

The Quranic Stories

(قرآنی قصص)

Dr. Abdus Sattar

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Al-Quran contains a number of stories mostly of Prophets, to illustrate morals and lessons which are of permanent importance in the life of men and peoples. Dr. M. A. Sattar has picked up the stories and presented them in this book for the education of the youths and benefit for common readers.

The text of the stories as composed in English was kept strictly within the bounds of the authentic English version of Allama Yusuf Ali and others. The author has not added of his own. To make the stories interesting and attractive for his readers he has composed these stories in simple, idiomatic and literary English. This style of the book is likely to make it presentable to the modern new world of Islam. The need of such a book in South-East Asia, Arab world and Africa is keenly felt. In Bangladesh itself, the book would provide useful reading material for school, college and university students as well as the general readers ; it would also serve the purpose of ready reference.

Dr. Sattar deserves the word of praise for the pains he has taken out of love of our children and youths.

P R E F A C E

The first draft of 'The Quranic Stories' was written when I was kept in solitary confinement on political grounds in Rawalpindi Jail by the Government of Pakistan during the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971. It was written with smuggled-in ballpoint refills on brown papers retrieved from fruit bags and cigarette boxes. The only source available was the **Holy Quran : Text Translation and Commentary** by Abdullah Yusuf Ali. To maintain the authenticity of the narrative throughout the book the direct dialogues have been quoted from the above translation of the Holy Quran. All anecdotes and stories are referred to in the Quran as Parables for their spiritual meaning. This purpose has been kept in view while collecting materials and quoting Ayats from the Holy Quran so that the main themes of the stories remain prominent.

The original sources of details for the Quranic anecdotes are the traditions (**Hadith**) and contemporary Muslim literature. After February 1972, when I was released unconditionally from the jail detention, but virtually interned in Islamabad, I had opportunities to consult a number of authentic sources for checking facts and adding more details, among others, **Qisasul Quran** by Quazi A. F. M. Mafizuddin Ahmed. I have also benefited from the comments of many persons. I would like to specially acknowledge the help of

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Messrs Abu Syed, Ahmad Hussain, Murtaza Siddiqui, Moinuddin Ahmed Khan and Abul Hussain. Without my wife Ellen's encouragement and her editorial help the book would not have reached its present form. I am grateful to the Islamic Foundation for accepting the book for publication.

The book was written originally for my sons ; to give them an understanding of the spirit of Islam through the Quranic stories. A number of friends and their children read the manuscript. It was their interest and enthusiasm that made me realize that there was a demand for such a book among the general public. A labour of love during solitary confinement in a prison cell is thus offered as a gift for all children.

M. A. S.

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INTRODUCTION

It is appropriate that a short introduction is presented here to familiarise the reader with the Holy Quran and its fundamental messages, which are the main theme of the Quranic tales. In the Holy Quran the tales are referred to as illustrations of its messages and the details are assumed as known.

The Holy Quran was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (Peace be on him)¹ by Divine inspiration through the Angel Gibrael. The first revelation came to the Prophet in the Cave of Hira near the city of Mecca. The young Quraish, virtuous and thoughtful, was deeply aware of his environment. He was delighted with the wonders of the heavens, the splendour of sunrise and sunset, the beauty and variety of flowers, plants and animals. But at the same time, the ignorance, superstitions and idolatry, injustice and sufferings among the Arabs made him unhappy. For over two years he meditated frequently in the cave of Hira, sometimes alone and sometimes with his beloved wife, Khadija, about the mystery of life and death, the problems of man and his society, and the ways and means to make life happy and meaningful. His lonely soul was yearning for Divine light and guidance.

¹ It is an usual practice among Muslims to pray for God's blessings on the Prophet Muhammed whenever his name is read or heard of. The same is the practice for other prophets mentioned in the Quran.

And now behold ! one night, the Night of Power, during the month of Ramadan, Muhammad (peace be on him) saw a dazzling vision of beauty and light coming from an angel. He heard the word ringing out to him "Read !" The unlettered Prophet was puzzled and replied, "I do not know how to read." The angel seemed to come close and press him to his breast in an embrace, and the call rang clear, "Read !" and so it happened three times. Then the angel recited the following five verses :

1. Read : (or Proclaim) in the name of the Lord and Cherisher Who created—
2. Created man out of a (mere) clot of congealed blood—
3. Read : (or Proclaim) And thy Lord is most Bountiful,—
4. He Who taught (the use of) the Pen,—
5. Taught man what he knew not.

Muhammad (peace be on him) went out of the cave on to the hillside trembling in fear, and he heard the same reassuring voice declare, "Oh ! Muhammad ! Thou art Allah's Messenger and I am Gibrail." Then the angel disappeared. An overpowering sensation of fear gripped the Prophet. Slowly he collected himself and realised the great responsibility of a prophet to convey Allah's message clearly and publicly to mankind and guide them to Allah's true path.

The first revelation came to Muhammad (peace be on him) when he reached the mature age of forty. During

the next twenty-three years of his prophethood the Quran was revealed at different stages. The verses (ayats) used to be written down by his followers as soon as they were recited by the Prophet. The following Verses of Chapter CX (Nasr) and a part of Verse 4 of Chapter V (Maida) were the last revelations :

- CX : 1. When comes the help of Allah, and victory,
 2. And thou dost see the people enter Allah's religion in crowds,
 3. Celebrate the praises of thy Lord, and pray for His forgiveness : for He is oft-Returning (in grace and mercy).

- CV. 4. This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed my favour upon you, and chosen for you Islam as your religion.

The above verses were revealed in Arafat, during the Prophet's Farewell Pilgrimage (632 A. D.), when almost the whole of Arabia had accepted Islam, and the multitude of people gathered there for the sole purpose of glorification of Allah, the Merciful. These verses not only signified that victory was the crown of all services and is not an occasion for exultation, but also Muhammad's (peace be on him) mission was successfully completed.

After receiving these revelations the Prophet realized that his earthly life would end soon and he delivered, sitting on a camel-back, a memorable sermon to the congregation of hundreds of thousands of Muslims in the sacred valley of Arafat. He said, "I apprise you that

your lives, your properties and your honour must be sacred to one another. This day all sums of interest are remitted, This day the retaliation for all murders committed in the days of ignorance is cancelled. You have certain rights over your wives, so have your wives over you . . . They are the trusts of Allah in your hands. So you must treat them with all kindness . . . And as regards your slaves, see that you give them to eat of what you yourself eat and clothe them with what you clothe yourself . . . you must know that every Muslim is the brother of every other muslim . . . do not tyrannize over your people, i. e., do not usurp their rights."

Then the Prophet cried out at the top of his voice : "O Lord ! Have I conveyed Thy Message ?" And the valley resounded with the reply from the multitude of human voices with one accord, "By Lord ! surely you have."

As the body of the sacred scripture grew, it was arranged under the direction of the Prophet for the purposes of recitation in prayer and study for guidance. This is the Glorious Quran, the Book of Light and Mercy, for peace and happiness of mankind.

It is a voluminous book. It has 114 suras (chapters). Each sura is divided into ayats (verses). The largest sura 2, consists of 286 ayats and the three smallest suras 103, 108 and 110, each consists of three ayats. There are 6,247 ayats in the Quran. The Suras have been arranged according to subject-matter and not according to the chronology of revelation.

The essence of the Holy Quran is in the first sura of seven ayats. It is a prayer, considered the heart of the religion of Islam. These seven ayats are :

1. In the name of Allah Most Gracious, Most Merciful,
2. Praise be to Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds,
3. Most Gracious, Most Merciful,
4. Master of the day of judgment,
5. Thee do we worship and Thine aid we seek,
6. Show us the straight way,
7. The way of those on whom Thou hast bestowed Thy Grace, those whose (portion) is not wrath and who go not astray.

The fundamental messages of the Holy Quran are simple and direct : First, between Allah and man is the relation of the **Unity of Faith**. The message of unity of faith has three basic aspects. The **First** is the faith in Allah, the Creator, the Cherisher and the ultimate Judge of all human actions, and the faith that Allah's commands are carried out by angels. The **Second** is the faith in the continuity of prophethood, i. e., every nation has had its prophets, and the prophets conveyed the same message of unity of faith and righteous actions although the messages changed progressively in their presentations and detailed rules of conduct to suit the various stages of human civilization. Some prophets received revealed books, for example, the Taurat by Moses, the Psalms (Zabur) by David, the Gospel (Injeel) by Jesus and the Holy

Quran by Muhammad (peace be on him) who is the last of the chain of prophets. The **Third** aspect is the brotherhood of mankind, all being born of Adam and Eve.

The practical signs of the unity of faith are the following four religious rites: prayer (remembrance, praise and adoration of Allah), fasting (during the lunar month of Ramadan), pilgrimage to Mecca (at least) once in a life-time for those who can afford the journey, and charity (at least one-fortieth of the net savings from annual income). These rites are means, aimed at strengthening the faith and preparing a Muslim to act righteously towards his fellow men.

The second fundamental message of the Holy Quran, the call to righteous actions, has both a general as well as a specific implication. In general terms it covers all just, good and reasonable actions, individually and collectively, with regard to man himself, his family, and the larger national and international community. Its guiding principle is justice which can be tempered only with mercy. Its message is not exclusive, it is rather universal as evident from the Quran: "Those who believe (in the Quran), and those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Christians and the Sabians, and who believe in Allah and the Last Day and work righteousness, shall have their reward with their Lord; on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve". (11. 62) It also gives specific directions regarding management of properties, all forms of social and economic contracts, proper dress, wholesome food, good manners

and honourable dealings. All acts of love and compassion to one's family, neighbours, children, orphans, destitutes and to all creatures of Allah are righteous acts, and so are the great works of art and literature, which satisfy man's aesthetic senses and inspire noble acts, and the great discoveries and inventions in science and technology, which increase knowledge and improve the quality of human life. All beneficial work, disinterested love for fellow men and compassion for all creatures on earth are the hallmarks of good Muslims.

The Quran emphasizes a rational and an action-oriented philosophy of life. The basic principle is the doctrine of individual responsibility. God will judge man according to his capacity and efforts. That is why Muhammad's (peace be on him) sign of prophethood, unlike those of other prophets, was the unique miracle of the Holy Quran, which appealed to the human heart inspiring it to the belief in the Unity of Faith and to his rational mind inducing it to righteous actions. In his spiritual self, man freely chooses his relationship with Allah and enjoys the sublime joy of being in harmony with His will. Strong in his belief in the unity of faith, submitting himself to the beneficial will of Allah, practising righteous acts, the devotee finds peace and harmony prevailing everywhere.

The basic theme of the stories that follow is these fundamental messages of the Holy Quran. The Quran is a Book of Light and Mercy, treasures from which everyone, a child or an adult, is free to carry off as much as he has the capacity and strength to bear.

ADAM AND EVE (HAUWA)

Allah is the creator of all things, the heavens and the earth, and everything in and between them. His way of creation is simple. When He wishes to create anything, He just commands. "Be" and it comes into being. His commands, in some cases, may be accomplished within the twinkling of an eye; in other cases, they may set in a process of evolution which may extend over millions of years.

Before Allah made Adam and Eve, He created the earth and the universe around us, and made habitable for man the earth with water, plants and animal life. To-day there are many races, such as the white Europeans, the dark Africans, the yellow Chinese, the brown Indians and Bangladeshis. They speak different languages, for example, English, Chinese, Arabic, French, German, Hindi and Bengali. In spite of all their differences of colour and language, they all belong to one family, one brotherhood of mankind; for their first parents were Adam and Eve. They all are created by Allah and are equally loved and protected by Him.

Allah created the earth in six stages, each stage running into millions of years. The first stage was that of the creation of the primal matter, and the formation of the sun with its planets, including our earth, from the cosmic system. The earth was gaseous, hot and luminous. The second stage was that of earth's cooling and

condensing from gas to liquid to the formation of land, mountains and seas. The third and fourth stages saw the evolution of vegetable and animal life. The fifth and sixth stages marked the completion of the solar system and the starry realm.

As He created, Allah also gave unchanging natural laws to govern His creation. For example, the heavenly bodies, the sun, the moon and millions of stars follow their own courses in space. They follow their laws of motion and mutual gravitational attraction. The creepers and trees grow and wither following botanical laws. The flower and tree give fruit which man and other animals eat. Their seeds give birth to new plants. Similarly all animals on lands, fish in water and birds in air follow their biological laws. Many of these laws are still shrouded in mystery. Scientists are working in their laboratories and observatories to discover the yet unknown natural laws.

Allah created angels, the invisible messengers, who are always on His command, on errands of justice and mercy to mankind. Some of the angels act as guardian angels to help and protect man and record his deeds day and night, so that perfect justice be done to him at the end of his life on earth.

Allah created the heavens and the earth and all the things in between them for a true, just and righteous purpose. He assembled the angels and declared to them that He would create man as His viceregent to rule all over all his creations on earth. He created Adam from

mud moulded into shape, fashioned him in handsome looks, and breathed into him His holy spirit, thus giving him the purest and best of nature. He also taught Adam knowledge of nature of things so that, as Allah's viceregent, he could act wisely. The Angels did not have the knowledge which Allah taught Adam. Thus Adam was made superior to angels, and he deserved respect from them.

When Allah asked the angels to show respect to Adam by bowing down to him, the angels obeyed **but not so Iblis**. He was proud and arrogant; he felt that he was superior to Adam as he was made from fire and Adam from clay. For his arrogance and disobedience, Allah rejected Iblis and cursed him as **Satan**, the evil spirit. Satan has bad influence on those who follow evil, but has no power of evil over good men.

Allah created Adam's companion and wife, Eve. Adam and Eve were placed in the heavenly garden of bliss. They could enjoy all good things, peace and beauty in the garden. They were as innocent as little children, had no sense of shame and did not feel the need to cover their bodies. Allah gave them, the future vice-regents on earth, the freedom of choice either to obey or disobey Allah and be prepared for reward or punishment as the case might be. Allah imposed on them a restriction; its transgression would mean expulsion from the garden to the wide open earth. They were forbidden to approach and taste only one particular

thing in the garden, a certain tree. Allah also forewarned them not to listen to Satan, for he was an avowed enemy of man.

Then Satan began to whisper suggestion to Adam and Eve swearing that he was a sincere adviser to them. He said, "Your Lord forbade you this tree lest you should become angles or such beings as live for ever." By deceit, Satan persuaded them to disobey Allah's restriction. When Adam and Eve tasted the fruits of the forbidden tree, the stage of their blissful innocence was gone and awoke to a sense of shame of being physically naked. They began to sew together leaves of the Garden to cover their bodies with.

Allah called to them, "Did I not forbid you that tree and tell you that Satan was an avowed enemy unto you?" Adam and Eve realised their mistakes and became repentant. They said, "Our Lord! We have wronged our own souls. If Thou forgive us not and bestow not upon us Thy mercy, we shall certainly be lost." Allah is Forgiving and Merciful. He accepted Adam's repentance; and imbued him with a spiritual guidance for leading a righteous life on earth. Allah said, "Get ye down with enmity between yourselves. On earth will be your dwelling place and your means of livelihood for a time. Oye children of Adam! We have bestowed on you raiment to cover your nakedness as well as to be an adornment for you; but the raiment of righteousness—that is the best."

After their expulsion from the garden of bliss they lost each other. They wandered separately on the virgin earth for many years. Finally they both met on the Hill of Arafat near the city of Mecca. Their joys knew no bounds. They built a home for themselves. Soon they started having children, boys and girls, who eventually grew up as men and women. They in turn married among themselves and had their own children. Thus the children of Adam multiplied.

Qaabil (Cain) and Haabil (Abel) were two sons of Adam. Qaabil, the elder brother, was proud and arrogant. He was under the influence of Satan. Haabil, the younger brother, was righteous and innocent. And it so happened that both the brothers decided to offer sacrifices to Allah. Haabil's sacrifice was accepted but Qaabil's was not. At this Qaabil became very angry and said to Haabil, "Be sure I'll slay thee". "Surely," said Haabil, "Allah doth accept of the sacrifice of those who are righteous." He continued, "If thou stretch thy hand against me, it is not for me to stretch my hand against thee: for I do fear Allah, the Cherisher of the worlds." But the selfish, proud and jealous Qaabil murdered his innocent brother Haabil.

Qaabil was wondering what to do with his brother's corpse. He saw a raven scratching the ground, and thus showing him how to bury the dead body. He regretted that he did not so much as know how to bury a corpse; he had to learn it from a raven!

Taking an innocent life is the most dreadful sin. Qaabil was guilty of such a sin. To kill an innocent person because he believes in an ideal is to threaten the whole community who uphold the ideal. Such a sinner must be punished severely. On the other hand, it is an act of great virtue to protect an individual who stands for an ideal, for it is equal to saving all those who uphold the same ideal.

Allah, the Merciful, assured the children of Adam that those who avoid being seduced by Satan to evil deeds and follow Allah's guidance given them through their own conscience, and through Prophets and revealed books, have no fear from their Lord. Those who have faith and are righteous in their thought and action, Allah shall reward them with His grace and blessings both in this life and in the life hereafter.

NOAH (NUH) AND THE ARK

The children of Adam spread over many lands. Allah sent many prophets to guide them in the way of justice and righteousness. Many centuries after Adam, when people forgot Allah and became wicked, Noah was chosen as the prophet to his people who were living in the north of the fertile Tigris valley near the Arafat Plateau.

Noah's mission was to warn a wicked people against evil and to call them to repentance and also to give them the glad tidings of Allah's grace in case they turned to Allah.

Noah preached to his people patiently for years and years to worship of one Allah and a return to righteous and honest living. Some poor people listened to him and obeyed him.

Once there was a big argument between Noah and the chiefs of the unbelievers. The chiefs became jealous of Noah, for he was a prophet, enlightened and wise. They asked him how he could possibly be a prophet. Wasn't he just a man like themselves? They had nothing but contempt for the weak and poor and said that only the meanest and immature among themselves followed Noah. They were arrogant and proud of their wealth. They said that Noah was no better than themselves and they even considered Noah and his followers to be liars. How could they accept Noah

since they never heard among their ancestors anything like what Noah preached ?

Noah answered them truly and gently. First, he told them in humility that he was just a messenger of Allah and he had to preach the message plainly in public. It was a message of mercy which in their arrogance the chiefs could not see. He also told them that there could be no compulsion in religion. Those poor people who had accepted willingly the message would be blessed by Allah but the chiefs were ignorant. Noah also refuted their accusation that he was a liar, or that he wanted some personal gain. On the contrary, he sought no reward from them ; for he looked to Allah for reward rather than to man. Finally, Noah asserted that he was not a vulgar soothsayer pretending to reveal secrets, nor was he an angel. He was their real well-wisher, delivering a true message from Allah, their creator and sustainer.

The chiefs had no answer to Noah's patient and truthful argument. So they accused Noah of prolonging the dispute and threw out their challenge arrogantly. "You foretell disaster to us if we don't mend our ways ! Let us see you bring it on ! Now if you please ! Or shall we call you a liar !"

Noah's only answer to the blasphemous challenge was : "I never claimed that I could punish you. All punishment is in the hands of Allah and He knows best when His punishment will descend. But this I

can tell you. His punishment is sure to come, if you do not repent and when it comes you will not be able to ward it off !"

Some of the unbelievers started calling Noah a mad man ; some began to plot mischief against him ; and some others threatened to stone him to death if he did not desist from preaching his message.

A point was reached when it became clear that there was no hope of saving the sinners who were courting their own destruction. Noah felt that his people had finally rejected him. He called on his Lord to help him and judge between him and the unbelievers. Noah cried out in despair, "Oh my Lord ! leave not of the unbelievers a single soul on earth ! For, if Thou dost leave (any of) them they will breed none but wicked ungrateful ones. Oh my Lord ! Forgive me, my parents, all who enter my house in faith, and all believing men and believing women, and to the wrong-doers grant Thou no increase but in perdition !"

Allah listened to his prayer and consoled him, "None of thy people will believe except those who have believed already. So grieve no longer over their (evil) deeds." Their punishment would be drowning by a great flood.

Noah was directed by Allah to construct a great ark, a vessel to remain afloat in the flood, so that good people could be saved in it. Noah, his family and his followers started construction of the Ark with

broad planks, caulked with palm-fibre. Every time the chiefs of the unbelievers passed by him, they used to ridicule him. The preacher had turned a carpenter ! Their city was on the high land far away from the sea and still Noah was talking of a flood like the sea ! Noah put his trust in Divine guidance, and did not waver from the task of building the ark. He said that if the chiefs ridiculed him now, he in his turn could look down on them with ridicule likewise when the penalty of their rejection of the true message, the great flood, submerged them.

As Noah's ark was completed, Allah's command came. Heavy rains poured down from the sky and water gushed forth from the springs below. Noah was asked to embark into the ark with his followers and his family, except his disobedient son Kenan. He took on board two, male and female, of each kind of beings, and animals. What a huge ark it must have been to take in hundreds of big and small animals and thousands of birds and insects ! As the water level rose, the ark floated on the waves.

Noah saw his disobedient son with the unbelievers and called out to him, "My son ! embark with us and be not with the unbelievers !" The son replied, "I will betake myself to some mountain. It will save me from water".

Noah said, "This day nothing can save, from the command of Allah, any but those on whom He hath mercy !" And the waves came between them and the son was among those drowned in the flood.

After a few days when all the wicked people perished Allah ordered, "Oh earth ! swallow up thy water and O sky ! withhold (Heavy rain) !" The water level come down and the great flood ended, the ark rested on the mount Judi.

The word came to Noah to come down from the ark with peace and blessings from Allah. Noah lived many years after the great flood in a world purged of sinners. He died at a venerable old age.

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HUD THE APOSTLE TO THE 'AD PEOPLE

The 'Ad tribe lived in Southern Arabia and was so called after their ancestor 'Ad son of Aus, son of Aram, son of Sam, son of Noah.

The 'Ad people were strong and tall in stature. Their land was served by an irrigation system and in their fertile fields they grew various fruits and rains in plenty. High up in the mountain they built their summer cities to save themselves from the hot desert weather in the plains. Their cities in the plains were equally beautiful, adorned with splendid buildings, monuments and statues. Proud in their wealth and material civilization, they became wicked and forsook the true Allah. They worshipped separate deities for rain and food, for protection from their enemies and diseases. The rich and powerful among them oppressed the poor and weak ruthlessly.

Hud was born in one of the noble families. He grew up to be a handsome and wise youngman. When he was twenty years old, Allah chose Hud as an apostle to preach His message to the 'Ad people and to guide them to act justly and kindly among themselves. He called upon his people to turn to Allah.

Oh my people ! worship Allah : Ye have no other God but Him. (Your other Gods) ye do nothing but invent, O my people ! I ask of you no reward for this (Message). My reward is from none but Him who created me. Will ye not then understand.

Hud The Apostle To The 'Ad People

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And O my people ! Ask forgiveness of your Lord and turn to Him (in repentance). We will send you the skies pouring abundant rain, and add strength to your strength. So turn you not back in sin.

But the unbelievers were hardened sinners. They committed cruelty and injustice and thought that they were safe in their strong and beautiful stone houses. An old Arab tradition states that one of their kings named Shaddad was very proud of his wealth and boasted that he could make as beautiful "garden as, or even a better garden than the heavenly garden of Allah," So he built a 'heaven', 400 miles square, adorned with gorgeous buildings, gardens and fountains. God punished him for his pride and arrogance. Poor Shaddad died on the doorstep of his 'Paradise' before he could complete his ceremonial entry into his garden when completed. Like their king Shaddad, the 'Ad people refused to believe in the true faith. They did not want to give up their false gods and the rich, their privileges. On the other hand, they tried to discredit Hud. They declared him an imbecile and one possessed by one of their gods.

In despair, Hud prayed to Allah for some mild punishment for his people by way of warning and to make them realise their faults. As a first warning, a terrible drought and famine afflicted them. Their irrigation channels dried up, the green gardens wilted and grain fields withered. But they did not repent, but rather became more arrogant and accused Hud for their misfortune. They said that he was only trying

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In despair, Hud prayed to Allah for some mild punishment for his people by way of warning and to make them realise their faults. As a first warning, a terrible drought and famine afflicted them. Their irrigation channels dried up, the green gardens wilted and grain fields withered. But they did not repent, but rather became more arrogant and accused Hud for their misfortune. They said that he was only trying

the customary devices of the ancients. There was no such thing as a 'hereafter' nor the sort of punishment that he was predicting for their misdeeds. Citing the fate of the people of Noah, Hud gave a final warning to the sinful and arrogant people of 'Ad. At the same time he comforted the small band of his followers saying that no harm would come to thee. The Adites refused to give up worshipping their old deities.

The punishment came surely and it came when they least expected it. They wanted rain after the drought. They saw a cloud and rejoiced. It was coming to their own tracts winding through the hills. But no! It was a tremendous tornado carrying destruction on its wings! A violent blast with dust and sand! The furious tornado continued for eight days and seven nights. Its fury destroyed everything in its wake! The morning after the tornado dawned on a scene of desolation! The men who boasted and defied their Lord were gone! There were only the ruins of their houses and monuments as witness to the past.

The ruined cities and the destroyed 'Ad nation are signs to show how injustice and arrogant pride can destroy a nation and its civilization.

The Apostle Hud and his seventy followers took shelter in a protected place. By the grace of Allah these good people were saved. Hud lived many years after this event and preached the messages of Allah to people in southern Arabia. He died at an old age in the ancient Arabian city of Hadramouth.

SALIH THE APOSTLE TO THE THAMUD PEOPLE

The Thamud people were the successors to the culture and civilization of, and closely related to, the 'Ad people. The tribe was so called after their ancestor Thamud. Thamud was a son of Abir, the son of Sam, the son of Noah. They lived in the north-western corner of Arabia, a rocky country with many fertile valleys. The Apostle Hud and his companions, after the destruction of the 'Ad people, visited the land of the Thamud and preached among them.

Like the 'Ad people, they built beautiful cities in the plain for winter and high up in the mountain for the summer days. They cut rocks and built splendid dwelling houses, palaces and temples. They also built fine cave houses inside the mountain. With the increase of wealth and the progress in material civilization, the Thamud people became godless and arrogant. They forgot the teachings of the Apostle Hud, and started worshipping stone idols. The rich and powerful among them used to oppress and exploit the poor and the weak.

The Apostle Salih was chosen to call them to Allah and to a righteous way of life. He appeared more than two hundred years after the Apostle Hud.

Salih was born in one of the noble families of the Thamud. From his childhood his truthfulness and virtues were much admired. In his youth, he grew up as handsome man of strong character. When he started preaching, the chiefs tried to tempt him with worldly success. They asked him, why he should go against the religion of their forefathers. They also told him that Salih had a very promising career; he could become their king only if he followed their way of worshipping the idols. But he had a higher mission, that of an apostle of Allah. He could never be tempted by worldly gains. Then they changed their tactics, they boycotted him socially and started ridiculing him. But Salih remained steadfast in his mission.

The Wonderful She-Camel

The rich among the Thamud owned most of the good land and controlled the water supply. The poor had neither enough land nor enough water to graze and water their cattle and camels. Salih had to oppose these privileges of the chiefs and the rich, and champion the rights of all men on Allah's free earth. He reminded them of the fate of the 'Ad people when they refused to return to a righteous and honest life.

During the annual fair he preached to an assembly and many people accepted his teachings. The chiefs became worried as they saw the number of Salih's

followers increase. They wanted to discredit him. So they told Salih that if he could show a miracle as a proof of his prophethood they would gladly accept his teachings. The head chief suggested that Salih might bring forth a milch camel from the mountain.

Salih prayed to Allah to send a milch camel as an evidence of his prophethood. Suddenly there was a thundering sound from the mountain. Soon afterwards a beautiful pregnant camel came running towards the city. The she-camel gave birth to a beautiful calf. On seeing the miracle happening, some people accepted Salih's teachings, but many others did not keep their promise. On the contrary, they called him a magician. Salih warned his people, "O my people! This she-camel is a symbol to you. Leave her to feed on Allah's earth, and inflict no harm on her, or a swift penalty will seize you!"

But their only reply was to defy the appeal and hamstring and kill the camel. The calf was frightened at this and it ran away towards the mountain. On hearing the sad news, Salih called the chiefs and told them that they had broken their covenant and their wrong doings deserved punishment. For a last chance, they were given just three days for repentance! They paid no heed. On the other hand, nine miscreants of the city plotted to kill the holy prophet secretly by night. However, by a special grace of Allah, Salih and his followers were saved.

A terrible earthquake preceded by a mighty rumbling blast overtook Thamud by night. It buried the Thamud people in their own fortress homes ! This is how the proud and arrogant people were punished and humbled.

THE PROPHET ABRAHAM (IBRAHIM)

After Noah many apostles came to guide people in the way of Allah. Abraham was one of them. He was the father of the Semitic people to whom the three great religions were revealed : Judaism through Moses, Christianity through Jesus and Islam through Muhammad (peace be on them).

Abraham Turns to the One God

Abraham lived among the Chaldean people in the Mesopotamian valleys, where the old empires of Babylon and Assyria had flourished. The Chaldeans were great astronomers. They used to worship the sun, the moon, the stars and many idols representing them, instead of the all-powerful Allah who created all these heavenly bodies.

As a young man Abraham sought the truth about life and the universe around. He was guided to the glory of Allah and his soul was enlightened with the knowledge of physical forces and various laws of nature. He became aware of his spiritual enlightenment in a dramatic manner.

One night as the darkness covered him, he saw a bright star ; he said, "This is my Lord."

But when it set, he said, "I love not those who set."

When he saw the moon rising in full glory, he said, "This is my Lord." But soon the moon set.

He felt puzzled and said, "Unless my Lord guides me, I shall surely be among those who go astray."

He started meditating through sleepless nights on the mystery of creation. As the dawn arrived, the sun rose in splendour, and he said, "This is my Lord. This is the greatest." But in the evening when the sun set, he realised that there must be someone behind all this rising and setting of stars, the moon and the sun. He thought, there must be a Creator and regulator of everything in the heavens and the earth. Thus he came to realise that the Creator was none but one Allah. Firmly convinced in his faith he declared, "O my people! I am now free from the sin you are guilty of, that of belief in partners of Allah. For me I have set my face firmly and truly towards Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth."

Unbelievers attempt to burn Abraham

Once enlightened and chosen as an Apostle, Abraham started preaching to his people against worshipping idols and stars. Azar, his father, was a noted idol maker and worshipper. Abraham solicited his father to submit to Allah but Azar rudely rejected his solicitations. One day he had an argument in front of the temple with his people about the idols that they worshipped. He wanted to convince them of the powerlessness of the stone idols. He told them that once they were gone, he would do something

to the idols to prove their uselessness. The audience were rather amused and wondered what Abraham might do, and they left him alone with their idols.

Inside the temple in front of the idols there were baskets full of fruits, dishes covered with delicious sweets and golden cups filled with drink. Abraham asked the idols mockingly why they did not eat or reply to his question. Of course, the idols could neither eat nor speak. Abraham left the biggest idol untouched and broke the others to pieces, and it looked as if a fight had taken place between the idols. Then he put the hammer on the shoulder of the biggest idol as if he smashed the others and was the victor in the fight.

When this was discovered by the priests they asked "Who has done this to our gods?" Those who had heard Abraham the previous night suspected him of having done the mischief. A formal council of the people was held and Abraham was brought before them. They asked him whether he did this damage to their gods.

Abraham had already threatened openly to do some harm their idols. He wanted to confound them with the folly of worshipping idols, and said that the big fellow must have done this in a quarrel among themselves. He added, "Why not ask them if they could speak?"

What could the councillors say? They turned to each other. Some among them felt that Abraham had

the best of the argument. But they made a straight reply to Abraham's taunting question and said that Abraham knew quite well that the idols could not speak.

As soon as they admitted that the idols could not speak, Abraham delivered his final attack. He declared, "Do you then worship, beside Allah, things that can neither be of any good to you nor can do you any harm? Fie upon you and upon the things that you worship besides Allah! Have you no sense?" He also added, "Do you worship your own handiwork? Surely worship is due to him who made you and gave you the skill to carve out idols."

Meanwhile the king Nimrud heard about the incident in the temple and summoned Abraham to his court. Nimrud posed himself as one of the gods and tried to persuade Abraham to return to the religion of worshipping idols and stars. But Abraham replied that he worshipped only One Allah, Who can give life and cause death. Nimrud declared that he too could give or take life. To prove his point, he ordered immediately the execution of an innocent man and the setting free of a convict.

Abraham realized that Nimrud did not understand the significance of the mystery of life and death. So, to prove to Nimrud the fact that his worldly power was very limited indeed, he put forward an obvious argument. He challenged Nimrud to change the laws of Allah and order the sun to rise in the west and set in the east. Nimrud felt helpless and confounded.

Although Abraham won the argument, the king, the chiefs and the privileged priests did not want to accept Abraham's teachings, as they were afraid to lose their wealth and privileges. They also wanted to avenge themselves for the insults to their idols. They were the party in power. They resorted to violence to frighten Abraham away from his sacred mission. But Abraham could not abandon Allah. His devotion to the cause of Allah and his courage to tell the truth were above all fears. He stood by his faith when he was condemned to death by burning in a blazing fire.

Abraham put his trust in Allah. When Allah was his protector none could do any harm to him. For days together a furnace was heated. On the appointed day a large assembly gathered near the furnace. Abraham was thrown into the blazing fire. But the burning fire, by Allah's command became delightfully cool. He came out of the furnace without any burn on his body. Even this miracle could not persuade the hardened sinners, Nimrud and his subjects, to accept Abraham's religion of faith in one Allah.

Abraham made a final effort to persuade his father Azar to turn to Allah. His father in his pagan arrogance not only rejected his sincere advice, but also threatened to punish him by stoning unless he left his father's house. Abraham was kind to his father and prayed to Allah, the most Gracious, to

forgive him. Then Abraham, along with his wife Sarah and nephew Lut, left his father's house and the land of the Chaldeans for good.

Travel to Canaan and The News of Sons and Grandsons

Abraham preached and travelled through Babylon, Assyria, Egypt and many other lands. He settled down finally in the fertile land of Canaan or Palestine. Abraham established a city named Jerusalem. People in the city and the surrounding land accepted his religion of one Allah and righteous conduct. His followers wanted to have a place of worship. He placed a sacred stone to mark the place of worship in the city centre. The stone was said to have been given to him by the Angel Gibrael. The city of Jerusalem where Abraham lived and died is equally sacred to the Jews, the Christians and the Muslims.

Through difficult trials and painful sufferings Abraham grew up in stature as a great prophet. At this time, he received the message that he was chosen to be the progenitor of a line of great prophets.

During his travel in Egypt, Abraham took an Egyptian princess, named Hajar, to wife. By her he was blessed with his first born son, Ismail. Ismail was the ancestor of the Arabs and the Prophet Muhammad. Abraham's first wife Sarah till then had no child.

One day two messengers visited Abraham's house. They addressed him saying "Peace". He answered

"Peace". Abraham being a hospitable host immediately arranged for a sumptuous meal of roasted calf for his guests. The strangers were apparently embarrassed. They were angels and did not eat. As his hospitality was refused, Abraham had a feeling of mistrust and fear about the strangers. They removed his fear by saying that they had good news for Abraham that he was to be father of Issac (Ishaq), and through Issac, the grandfather of Jacob (Y'akub).

Both Abraham and his wife Sarah were old. Abraham was about 100 years of age and Sarah was about 90 years old, beyond child bearing age. Sarah thought she was a barren old woman. She was wondering how it could be possible! The Messengers said, "Dost thou wonder at Allah's decree! The grace of Allah and His blessings on Ye people of the house! For He is indeed worthy of all praises, full of glory!"

And it so happened that Sarah conceived a child. In due course a beautiful baby boy was born. He was named Issac. When Issac was eight days old, Abraham was directed by Allah to circumcise Issac and all other male members of his family. This practice holds even today among Jews and Muslims. Issac grew up to become a handsome and strong young man. He married and had two sons, one of them was named Jacob. Jacob was the ancestor of the great line of Prophets: Moses, David, Solomon and Jesus.

Vision to Sacrifice Ismail

According to tradition, Abraham as directed by a Divine command, left lady Hajar and his infant son Ismail in a far off desert. He left some food and water for them. After a few days both food and water were finished. They both were very thirsty and hungry. There was no more milk for baby Ismail in the breast of lady Hajar. She prayed to Allah for water in the parched desert, and in search of water she ran seven times between the two adjoining hills of Safa and Marwa. Finally her prayer was answered and her persistent efforts to find out water was rewarded. She discovered the Zam-Zam spring from which she quenched her thirst and also that of baby Ismail.

As time passed Ismail grew up to become a handsome and virtuous boy. One night Abraham had a vision in which he was asked to offer sacrifice. In the morning he sacrificed some camels. In this way he had visions for the second and third nights, and he sacrificed some camels. On the fourth night he found out what the vision meant: he must sacrifice his own son. The next morning he said to Ismail, "O my son! I see a vision that I offer thee as sacrifice. Now see what is thy view!"

Ismail said, "O my father! Do as thou art commanded. Thou wilt find me, if Allah so wills, one practising patience and constancy!"

So when they both had submitted themselves to the will of Allah, and Ismail lay prostrate on his forehead in the valley of Mina near Mecca, Allah called out, "O Abraham! Thou hast fulfilled the vision". Instead of Ismail, a fine ram was symbolically sacrificed.

This obviously was a trial for both Abraham and Ismail and they ranged themselves in the ranks of those to whom self-sacrifice in the service of Allah was the supreme aim in life. Allah does not require the flesh and blood of animals, much less of human beings. But it is necessary that man should submit himself completely to the will of Allah. The symbol of this submission is that he should give up all that is very dear to him, if duty requires such sacrifice.

Founding of the Ka'ba

Abraham and his son Ismail rebuilt the Ka'ba, the House of Allah in Mecca—a centre for all people, a sacred territory, a sanctuary and a place of worship. This is the house towards which Muslims from all over the world turn their faces for prayer. After the foundation of the Ka'ba they prayed the following beautiful prayer to Allah, the Almighty:

Our Lord!

Accept this (service) from us,

For Thou art the All-Hearing, the All-knowing,

Our Lord! Make of us

Muslims, bowing to Thy (will),
 And of our progeny a people,
 Muslims, bowing to Thee,
 And show us our place for
 The celebration of (due) rites ;
 And turn unto us (in Mercy) ;
 For Thou art the Oft-Returning, Most Merciful
 Our Lord ! send amongst them
 An Apostle of their own,
 Who shall rehearse Thy Signs
 To them and instruct them
 In Scripture and Wisdom,
 And Sanctify them.
 For Thou art the Exalted in Might,
 The Wise.

This prayer was answered many years after the death of Abraham in the prophethood of Muhammad among the Arabs, the descendants of Ismail. The visitors to the Ka'ba can still find a place nearby called 'the standing place of Abraham, the spot where he used to pray to Allah.

The old name of the city of Mecca during the time of Abraham was Bakka, There are many spots with sacred associations in this city and its neighbourhood. Adam and Eve were reunited after their wanderings when expelled from the Garden of Bliss, on the hill of Arafat, called the Mount of Mercy, about eleven miles north of Mecca. There is the valley of Mina, six miles to the north of the city

where, following the tradition of Abraham and Ismail the evil spirit is condemned. It is said that here Satan tried unsuccessfully to mislead Ismail and Abraham when he was asked to sacrifice his beloved son Ismail. When Abraham become conscious of the wiles of Satan he and his son both threw stones at this spot cursing Satan. Then there are the hills of Safa and Marwa close to the well of Zam-Zam. Here the lady Hajar, mother of the infant Ismail, prayed for water in the parched desert, searched around these hills and found the Zam-Zam spring.

These two hills symbolize the virtue of patient persistence in faith as well as making the very best effort to achieve a noble object in life. Visits to all these places are included in the rites of the Pilgrimage to Mecca.

Muslims, bowing to Thy (will),
 And of our progeny a people,
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THE PROPHET LUT (LOT)

The Prophet Lut was a favourite nephew of Abraham. He accepted Abraham's religion of one Allah and righteous actions. Lut and his wife with their flocks of camel, cattle and sheep joined Abraham. They left their native land of the Caldeans, and travelled through many countries, finally reaching their destination in Canaan. Like his uncle, Lut also acquired a great pastoral wealth. In the company of Abraham and by his guidance, Lut attained his enlightenment as a prophet. He had the Divine command to go and preach the religion of Abraham in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah in the plains east of the Dead Sea.

The people of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were shamelessly addicted to vices against both natural and human laws. Allah made man and woman, as He made Adam and Eve, to love each other and enjoy family life together. But the people of these two cities were so much engrossed in sins that instead of women, they liked the company of men. They were also involved in other crimes, such as highway robbery, and rowdiness in public assemblies.

Lut on arrival declared himself before these people. He said, "I am to you an apostle worthy of all trust. So fear Allah and obey me. No reward do I ask of you for it: my reward is only from the

Lord of the Worlds." But except a few persons, they did not pay any heed to Lut's admonitions.

They did not believe in Allah and His rewards for good work and punishment for sins. Moreover, they taunted Allah's apostle Lut and asked him to bring about the punishment on to them. The hardened sinners threatened to drive Lut and his followers out of the city as they insisted on remaining clean and pure. In despair Lut sought Allah's help against those sinners. Allah granted his prayer.

Two messengers of Allah arrived at Lut's house one evening. Lut was praying at that time. His two daughters received the guests with due courtesy. Soon Lut appeared before the visitors. Knowing the habits of people in the city, he became a little afraid to entertain them in his house. The news of the arrival of handsome youngmen in Lut's house had already spread in the city, and a large number of persons appeared before Lut's house. This was in fact the last test for the people before their complete destruction. They had the last chance to repent and return to a good life. But they rushed blindly to their fate like insects to burning fire and closed the door of mercy for themselves.

Lut tried his best to dissuade them from misconduct with his guest. He offered them young girls whom they could marry. But they would not listen to him.

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Lut seemed helpless in the situation in which he found himself, alone against a rabble inflamed with evil passion. He wished he had the strength to suppress them himself or had some powerful support to lean on!

The powerful support was there, though he had not realised it till then. It was the support of Allah. His guests were not ordinary men, but angels who had come to test the people before they should inflict punishment. When people, assembled in front of the house, tried to break open the door, Lut prayed to Allah to protect the honour of himself and his guests. The angels blinded the besiegers who then ran away from the house in fear.

The angels declared their mission to Lut that the cities would be destroyed at dawn. But Allah's mercy would save every true soul who might be with Lut. They gave direction to Lut to get away from the city before dawn, when the punishment would descend on the doomed cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

In the morning a violent tornado in a sudden blast rained down sulphur, layer on layer, destroying the cities completely. The only people saved were Lut, his followers, and his family except his wife who disobeyed him and shared the fate of the wicked inhabitants of the cities.

The whole tract on the east side of the Dead Sea where once the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah existed

s now covered with sulphurous salts, deadly to both animal and plant life. It is a scene of utter desolation, and that should stand as a warning of the destruction that awaits sinners.

THE PROPHET JOSEPH (YOUSUF)

Joseph came from the family of Prophets. His father was Jacob (also called Israel, the soldier of Allah), the son of Issac, the younger son of Abraham. Jacob had four wives. From three of them he had ten sons. In his old age, he had by his beautiful wife Rachel two sons, Joseph and Benjamin. Their home was in a place now called Nablus, some thirty miles north of the modern city of Jerusalem. The story in the Quran begins when Joseph was about seventeen years of age.

Joseph's Dream

Joseph was a very handsome young man and he was equally truthful and righteous. His father loved him dearly. His ten half-brothers were jealous of him for his beauty and goodness and their father's love for him. But he did not carry any ill-will against his brothers. His destiny was shown to him in a dream that he dreamt.

Joseph narrated his vision to his father Jacob, "Oh my father! I did see eleven stars and the sun and the moon. I saw them prostrate themselves to me." He was to be exalted in wisdom and power above his brothers (the stars) and his father and mother (sun and moon). Jacob said to his beloved son, "My little son! Relate not thy vision to thy

brothers, lest they would hatch a plot against thee! For Satan is to man an avowed enemy! Thus will thy Lord choose thee and teach thee the interpretations of dreams (and events) and perfect His favour on thee! For Allah is full of knowledge and wisdom."

Brothers plotted

The ten brothers not only envied and hated their younger brothers Joseph and Benjamin, they also despised their father; for they thought that he loved Joseph and his brother more than themselves. Jacob had the goodness of heart and wisdom to see the greatness of Joseph and he felt that it was his duty to love and protect him. The brothers were proud and they showed discourtesy to Jacob whom they considered an ignorant old fool. They started plotting in order to get rid of Joseph. By doing that they thought foolishly that they could get more advantages from Jacob. Little did they think of his misery and the future of Joseph!

They plotted to slay Joseph or to banish him to some unknown land. They were hypocrites and thought that they could pretend to be good in order to hoodwink their father. One of the brothers, perhaps less cruel by nature, suggested that instead of slaying him, they could throw Joseph into a well and people of some caravan could pick him up. This plot was agreed upon and the brothers proceeded to put it into action.

They said, "O our father ! Why do you not trust us with Joseph although we are indeed his sincere well-wishers. Send him with us to-morrow to enjoy himself and play, and we shall take every care of him."

Jacob did not know the plot; but he had strong misgivings. He said, "Really it saddens me that ye should take him away. I fear lest a wolf should devour him when perchance you be unmindful of him."

The brothers tried to assure him of Joseph's safety. They said, "Woe be on us if the wolf were to devour him while we are quite a gang."

Although Jacob did not like the idea, he could not possibly drive them to open hostility. They thus prevailed upon their father and Jacob agreed to let them take Joseph on their outing.

Once they were out of the home, according to their plot, the brothers threw Joseph down to the bottom of a well. Joseph's weeping and entreating had no effect on his cruel brothers. Joseph was innocent, he did no harm to his brothers or anyone else. He had faith in Allah's will and he put his trust in Him. Allah protects the righteous and good. He was always with Joseph. Allah inspired his heart with faith that his own courage and purity of soul would help him prosper and perhaps some day his mischievous brothers would stand in need of him

and he would then be able to put them to shame for their cruelty to him and their betrayal of their father's trust. He was remembering Allah waiting with patience for deliverance from the dark depth of the well.

Meanwhile there came a caravan of merchants travelling to Egypt. The caravan was preceded by an advance party to search out water and pitch a camp there for the night. They found the well and lowered down their bucket. When they hauled it up, to their utter surprise a handsome youth came out in it ! The water drawer announced the good news of having found an unclaimed youth of uncommon beauty and personality. The merchants thought that they could sell him at a high price in the slave market of Memphis, the pharaonic capital of Egypt. They had indeed alighted on a treasure ! And they concealed him lest he was another's slave and had run away from his master who might come and claim him !

The brethren had been watching to see what happened to Joseph. When they saw the merchants hauling him up, they came to claim his price as a runaway slave. But they dared not haggle over the price, lest their object to get rid of him should be defeated. The merchants were shrewd enough to doubt if the claim were genuine. But they did not much haggle either, lest they should lose a very valuable acquisition. And so the most precious of

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and he would then be able to put them to shame for their cruelty to him and their betrayal of their father's trust. He was remembering Allah waiting with patience for deliverance from the dark depth of the well.

Meanwhile there came a caravan of merchants travelling to Egypt. The caravan was preceded by an advance party to search out water and pitch a camp there for the night. They found the well and lowered down their bucket. When they hauled it up, to their utter surprise a handsome youth came out in it ! The water drawer announced the good news of having found an unclaimed youth of uncommon beauty and personality. The merchants thought that they could sell him at a high price in the slave market of Memphis, the pharaonic capital of Egypt. They had indeed alighted on a treasure ! And they concealed him lest he was another's slave and had run away from his master who might come and claim him !

The brethren had been watching to see what happened to Joseph. When they saw the merchants hauling him up, they came to claim his price as a runaway slave. But they dared not haggle over the price, lest their object to get rid of him should be defeated. The merchants were shrewd enough to doubt if the claim were genuine. But they did not much haggle either, lest they should lose a very valuable acquisition. And so the most precious of

human lives in that age was sold into slavery for a few silver coins. But neither the brothers nor the merchants knew that they were only the instruments in Allah's plan for a better purpose.

The brothers returned home weeping late in the evening. This was only a pretension; they were glad that their plot had succeeded. They were ready with a false story. They said, "Oh our father! we went racing with one another and left Joseph with our things. And the wolf devoured him. But thou wilt never believe even though we tell the truth."

They stained Joseph's shirt with the blood of a goat which they had killed for this purpose. To make this story convincing, they showed Jacob the blood stained shirt. Their father saw through the foul play and he said, "Nay, but your minds got up a tale looking like a truth. For me patience is most fitting. Against what you assert, it is Allah (alone) whose help can be sought."

In the Household of the Egyptian Aziz

Joseph was now far beyond the reach of his jealous brethren, in the land of Canaan. The merchants took him to the slave market of Memphis, and there was, in the highest circle of the Pharaoh's court, a keen competition to own him. The Aziz, Grand Chamberlain of the Pharaoh, outbid all other competitors, and thus Joseph found himself in his household.

The Aziz was childless. His wife Zulaikha, a beautiful princess of the West, according to the poetical traditions, saw Joseph in a dream and fell in love with him. As her dream told her that her beloved was the Wazir (minister) of Egypt, her father arranged a match for her with the Aziz, neither of the parties having seen the other. While, therefore, she nominally passed for Aziz's wife she secretly cherished her love of the dream until Joseph appeared in the house. It was on the other hand natural that the childless Aziz should want to adopt Joseph as his son, and he asked Zulaikha to treat him as an honoured member of the household. He thought that such a handsome, attractive and intelligent son would bring him more honour, power and wealth. But Zulaikha had other feelings. Joseph was the man of her dream! She had a passionate love for him, but the true spiritual love was yet to develop in her.

Thus Joseph was firmly established in the house of the Aziz. In Canaan he was a young and innocent lad of seventeen. In the house of the Aziz and under his protection, strengthened with knowledge and spiritual power, Joseph flowered into full glory of manhood. Thus Allah rewards those who are righteous with knowledge and wisdom.

Zulaikha's love for Joseph, the man of her dream, exposed to her full view day in and day out under the same roof, became more passionate. She lost

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control of herself and forgot her duty to her husband. One day when Joseph was in her room she purposely closed the doors of her room and tried to seduce him. But Joseph remained pure in soul and dignified in his conduct. He said, "Allah forbid! Truly (thy husband) is my lord! He had made my sojourn agreeable. Truly no good come to those who do wrong!"

Zulaikha was blind with passion and his plea had no effect on her. Joseph too was a man with all the passion of youth. Her passionate love, her youth and beauty, placed a great temptation before him. But he had a sure protection in his faith in Allah. He knew that Allah was there inside the room and everywhere. Tempted but yet true in faith, he rose above his human nature. With Zulaikha in her mad passion, Joseph thought that it was useless to argue with her and he made a dash for the door to escape from her. She ran after him and tugged at the back of his shirt to detain him. In the scuffle she tore his shirt. The door opened before him and lo! There was the Aziz at the door!!

Slighted love made Zulaikha ferocious and in anger. She lost all sense of right and wrong. She cried, "What is the (fitting) punishment for one who formed an evil design against the wife, but prison or a grievous chastisement?" Joseph replied, "It was she that sought to seduce me from my (true) self."

Some members of the household also gathered at the scene. One of them, said to be a child, told the Aziz, "If it be that his shirt is rent in the front then is her tale true, and he is a liar. But if it be that his shirt is torn from the back, the she is the liar, and he is telling the truth." To the Aziz, it sounded very sensible.

When the Aziz looked at the shirt torn from the back the fact of the case became clear. The Aziz dealt with the situation with understanding and justice. He treated Zulaikha's case as a woman's prank, a love snare and urged her to ask for forgiveness of her sin. He turned to Joseph and requested him to let the incident pass over!

Encounter with the Society Women

The society ladies in the city started gossiping about Zulaikha's attempt to seduce her slave, her violent love for him. Haunted by their malicious talks, Zulaikha tried to justify herself to them by a stratagem. She invited all the ladies to grand feast. After delicious dishes when dessert was served and conversation flowed freely, the guests were just about to cut fruits with knives, when behold! Joseph was conducted to their presence. When they saw him, they did extol him and, in their amazement, cut their hands. They said, "Allah preserve us! No mortal is this! This is none other than a noble angel!"

Zulaikha said, "There before you is the man about whom ye did blame me! I did seek to seduce him

but he did firmly stuck to his spotless self. And now, if he doth not do my bidding, he shall certainly be cast into prison and, what is more, be humiliated."

Joseph felt helpless and prayed, "O my Lord! prison is more to my liking than that to which they invite me and, unless Thou turn them away from me, I shall (in my youthful folly) feel inclined towards them and join the ranks of the ignorant".

Joseph was saved from the wiles of the women who wanted to degrade him. By Zulaikha's avowal of the truth, his character was completely vindicated. The men in the city, however, were alarmed at the mad craving Joseph's beauty had roused among their women. They knew that Joseph was righteous. They had seen the signs of Allah in his wonderful personality. But they thought that it was probably better that one man (even if righteous) should suffer in prison rather than that many should suffer from the scandalous situation. Joseph's charm had given rise to in the social life of the city. And so Joseph was sent to prison.

Interpretation of Dreams in the Prison

With the prison term began a new phase in Joseph's life. Without sorrow, sufferings and striving, even the best of men cannot attain their full stature. Through them, they are taught the true sense of values. The spiritual self of an innocent prisoner is liberated in a human prison, but in contrast the oppressors, in their prisons of ignorance and arrogance,

cannot reach Allah's mercy. Joseph's life enlarged itself spiritually in the prison. He developed his personality for a high destiny in the future.

Joseph, in the purity of his soul and goodness of conduct, undertook to help others in the prison in whatever way he could. By his care and comforting advice he made life tolerable for many of his fellow-prisoners. Two men came to the prison about the same time as Joseph had done. They were both officers of the Pharaoh. One was the cup-bearer, whose duty was to prepare the king's wines and drinks. The other was the king's baker, whose duty was to prepare the king's bread. They were both suspected of infidelity and in disgrace. The cup-bearer dreamt that he was pressing wine out of grapes and the baker, that he was carrying bread on his head and birds were eating there from. They found Joseph wise, kind and helpful to other and they told him of their dreams, and asked him to interpret them.

Joseph's mission was far higher than of merely explaining the significance of dreams. He told them that they would learn everything before their next meal. He then went on to explain to them the essence of the true faith, faith in one Allah and the hereafter and the reason why none but Allah should be worshipped. After preaching to them the gospel of the true religion, he interpreted their dreams. The cup-bearer would be restored to the favour of the Pharaoh. For the baker, alas! he had bad news; he

would suffer crucifixion followed by exposure to the birds in the air.

Joseph, however, wanted to draw Pharaoh's attention to the injustice done to him. He requested the cup-bearer to remember him to the Pharaoh; for he was an innocent man kept unjustly in the prison. The cup-bearer, once in the court, forgot the poor fellow-prisoner languishing in prison.

From Prison to the Court of the Pharaoh

One day the pharaoh was in the Council of his Chiefs. The cup-bearer was present too. The Pharaoh narrated his two-fold dream, that of seven fat cows being devoured by seven lean ones and of seven full, green ears of corn and seven dry, withered ones—and asked for its explanation. No one in the Council could explain the dream. The cup-bearer remembered Joseph who interpreted correctly his dream in the prison. He took leave of the Council for asking Joseph the meaning of the king's dream.

Joseph not only explained the dream which forboded a calamitous famine, but also suggested remedial measures. He said that there would be seven years abundant harvests. With diligent cultivation they should get bumper crops. Of them they should eat just as much as they must and store the rest carefully. There would follow seven years of dreadful famine. They must be careful even during the famine not to consume all the grain; they must save a little

as seed. Following the seven years of drought, there would be a year of abundant water. The vine and olive trees which suffered in the drought would now revive and yield their juice and their oil. With this the peoples' spirits would revive to enjoy the finer products of the earth.

The cup-bearer reported the explanation of the dream to Pharaoh who wanted Joseph to be brought to his presence. When the messenger came to him, Joseph said, "Go thou back to my lord, and ask him, 'what is the state of the ladies who had cut their hands?' My Lord is certainly well aware of their snare."

The king said to the ladies, "What was your affair when ye did seek to seduce Joseph from his true self." The ladies said, "Allah preserve us! no evil know we against him," Zulaikha was also present. She said, "Now is the truth manifest! It was I who sought to seduce him. He is indeed of those who are true and virtuous." When this was reported to Joseph, he humbly said that he was always true to his lord, the Aziz, and that human soul was prone to evil; but for Allah's mercy none could remain pure.

The Pharaoh became very impressed by Joseph's wisdom and his trustworthiness, and he had Joseph attached to his own person as his Grand Chamberlain. But Joseph had no fascination for the luxury of the Pharaoh's court. He wanted to do

real service to people during a difficult period of Egypt's history. He willingly accepted the difficult task of grain storage, organizing reserves in the year of plenty against the lean years to come.

According to the poetic traditions, Zulaikha now a widow, bereft of beauty and health, yet cherished the memory of her true love to Joseph and watered it with tears of sorrow. Joseph in his turn realized the truth of her love which now stood chastened by her spiritual illumination. At his prayer Allah restored her health and beauty and they were married in pure and true love.

Thus works the Divine Providence. Joseph, the boy whom his jealous brothers sold to slavery for a few silver coins, became, at the age of thirty, the Grand Chamberlain of the greatest empire of the world at that time.

Meeting with the Brothers

Years passed, the time of prosperity went by; famine held Egypt and the neighbouring in its grip. According to Joseph's plan, the food reserves were plentiful in Egypt. The neighbouring countries purchased corn from Egypt. Driven by famine, Joseph' ten brothers came from Canaan to Egypt to buy corn. Joseph immediately recognised them; but all through the transactions they could not recognize him.

Joseph treated his brothers liberally. He inquired about the remaining members of their family in Canaan and came to know the condition of his father Jacob and his brother Benjamin. He told them that next time they must bring their youngest brother too; otherwise they would not get any grain nor would they have an entry into his presence. They left the city promising that they would certainly bring him. It was important for Joseph that they came back. If they returned, they would surely bring Benjamin with them after what he had told them. As an additional incentive to them to come back, he returned the money which they had paid for the grain in such a way that they should find it in the saddle-bag only when they reached home.

On their return they told Jacob all that had happened and entreated him to allow Benjamin to join them in their next trip to Egypt, a difficult matter after what had happened to Joseph before. Jacob did not reply directly but solemnly affirmed that the only protection he trusted was that of Allah. When they opened their saddle-bags they found that money they had paid for the corn had been returned to them by the kind Egyptian Minister! They pleaded that if they would go again with Benjamin he would give them more grain. It would cost them nothing. They would get one more camel load of grain. And so they stated the case to Jacob.

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The appeal on ground of the family's needs at the time of famine made Jacob relent. But he exacted a solemn promise from the brothers that they would bring Benjamin back to him safe unless they themselves became really powerless. To that promise Jacob called Allah to witness. He advised them, as a precaution, not to be too conspicuous but to enter the Egyptian city in small groups through different gates.

The eleven brothers including Benjamin arrived in Egypt and waited on the great minister. Joseph again received them hospitably, even more so than before as they complied with his request to bring Benjamin. He entertained them in a great feast. The guests were seated by two's. Benjamin was the odd one, and Joseph courteously took him to his own table. After the feast the question of lodging arose. Again Benjamin was the odd one whom the Minister invited to stay with him in his palace. In the privacy of the palace, away from the other brothers, Joseph disclosed his identity to his brother, asking him to keep it secret and not to take seriously any strange event that might occur to him.

At last when all business was settled with regard to buying of grain, a golden drinking cup was secretly put inside Benjamin's saddle-bag. This was to serve a double purpose. First, to make them thoroughly ashamed of themselves and bring home a sense of guilt to them, and secondly, it would give

Joseph an excuse to detain Benjamin, and ultimately to bring their aged father to Egypt. The cup was declared lost and the brothers were asked to fix the price of the theft if the cup were found in the saddle-bag of anyone among them. They said, "One who would be found guilty of the theft, should himself be the price of it. He will be reduced to slavery." Then their baggages were searched thoroughly and finally the royal cup was found in the saddle-bag of Benjamin. The brothers only readily believed evil of Benjamin, but also carried their bad thoughts to his brother Joseph calling him falsely a thief. Little did they know that Joseph himself was standing before them under the guise of an Egyptian Minister and that their falsehood and treachery would soon be exposed.

The brothers, however, remembered their solemn promise to Jacob and said, "O Aziz, Behold! he has a father, aged and venerable (who will grieve from him). So take one of us in his place; for we see that thou art among good souls."

He replied, "Allah forbid that we take other than him with whom we found our property. Indeed (if we did so), we should be acting wrongfully."

Judah, the leader among the brothers, offered to stay back in honour of the promise until his father would permit him to return or Allah would command him so to do through the release of Benjamin. The other brothers returned to Canaan and told Jacob,

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Jacob said, "Nay but ye have yourselves cooked up story (good enough) for you. So patience is most fitting (for me). May be, Allah will bring them (back) all to me (in the end). For He is indeed full of knowledge and wisdom."

His sorrow for Benjamin dug up a greater sorrow for Joseph and he said, "O my sons! go ye and enquire about Joseph and his brother and never give up hope of Allah's soothing Mercy. No one despairs of Allah's soothing Mercy except those who have no faith."

The nine brothers went again to Egypt according to their father's direction. They approached the Egyptian minister for charity as they were under distressed condition. Joseph now wanted to reveal himself. He had but to remind them of the treatment of their brother Joseph. They were a little frightened and asked, "Art thou indeed Joseph?"

Joseph replied, "I am Joseph, and this is my brother. Allah has indeed been gracious to us. Behold! He that is righteous and patient—never will Allah let the reward of those who do right to be lost."

Joseph was most generous on this day of reunion. He did not scold his brothers for their evil deeds. He said, "No reproach to you today." He asked them to

return to Canaan with a shirt of his and said, "Cast it on the face of my father and he will regain his vision." Then he asked them to come back with all their family to Egypt.

Family Reunited in Egypt

When the caravan left Egypt with Joseph's shirt, Jacob had a vision of what was to come and said, "I do indeed scent the presence of Joseph. Nay, think me not a dotard." But the members of the household around him thought that he was in his old wondering mind.

Finally the caravan reached home. Judah cast Joseph's shirt on Jacob's face. He had lost his eye sight weeping for his dearest son Joseph, but by Allah's Mercy, he regained a clear sight immediately. He said, "Did I not say to you, I know from Allah what ye know not."

The brothers said, "O our father! Ask for the forgiveness for our sins, for we are truly at fault." Jacob prayed for God's forgiveness for his mischievous sons.

Eventually the whole family of Jacob arrived in Egypt and were reunited with Joseph. Joseph provided them with house, security and honour. The family members prostrated before him in recognition of his rank. Thus was fulfilled the vision of Joseph's youth. He prayed in gratitude to Allah, "O my Lord! Thou hast indeed bestowed on me some favour and taught

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me something of the interpretation of dreams and events. O Thou Creator of the heavens and the earth! Thou art my protector in this world and in the Hereafter. Take Thou my soul (at death) as one who submits to Thy will, and unite me with the righteous."

THE PROPHET JOB (AIYUB)

Job was a prophet and a patriarch owning a large flock of cattle and a vast tract of land in the north-eastern corner of Arabia. His wife Rahima was a beautiful and a virtuous lady. They had many handsome children. He had so many servants and so much of wealth that it could even make a king envious. He was, however, a very devoted servant of Allah. He was regular in prayer and sincere in his gratitude to Allah. As an apostle he was preaching to his followers to be grateful to Allah for all His blessings, to remain patient in adversity and to remain just in dealing with fellow men.

Allah wanted to test the depth of Job's faith, his patience and humility, his trust and submission to His will, by putting him through one calamity after another. The purpose was to show mankind how a truly faithful servant of Allah conducts himself in adversity.

First, his cattle were destroyed by a disease. This made him a poor man, for among the pastoral people cattle was the main wealth. Secondly, his servants were killed by his enemies. There was none left to serve him and his family. Moreover, some of his children died under his roof. But Job, now a poor and forlorn man, faced all these calamities with calmness and still believed firmly in Allah's beneficial will in all his sufferings.

All his relatives and friends abandoned Job. Only his beloved wife Rahima remained with him giving him her warm love and kind devotion. As a further calamity he was covered with loathsome sores from head to foot. His sores gave such a foul smell that the townsfolk ousted him from the town. Rahima and Job built a thatched hut in a forest near the main road. Rahima used to go to the town every morning and return to the hut in the evening after working the whole day to buy food for Job.

Rahima felt greatly distressed to see Job suffering so badly. So she asked him to pray to Allah for the cure of his ailment. But Job submitted himself completely to the will of Allah. He replied that Allah had looked after him for eighty years in good health and prosperity; how could he be impatient now if he was to suffer from afflictions for only seven years. He thought it was his duty to pray and sing the glory of Allah both in prosperity and in adversity. Some of his old friends visited him one day in his humble hut. They attributed his afflictions to sin and said that he deserved to suffer in misery. These friends were no real comforters.

In his worst distress Job remained patient and constant in his faith. But his wife, a loving and tender hearted woman, became rather impatient. It is narrated that she proposed to Job the treatment of a doctor whom she had met on her way back home. The doctor

was confident that Job could be cured by him. He thought, if his treatment would restore Job to health, it must be admitted that Allah had no part in it, it is the doctor who cured him. The suggestion of such an idea threw Job into a fit of anger. At this Job in haste vowed to punish his wife with a severe beating. But Allah wanted him to correct his simple but sincere and well meaning wife but not so harshly. So Allah said, "Pick up a bundle of straw to beat her with and thus keep your oath."

Job knew that Allah raised some people in rank above others that He might test them in the use of His gifts. Job finally prayed, "O Lord ! Truly distress has seized me, but Thou art the most Merciful of all." Allah listened to his prayer and guided him to the path of relief and recovery, and his recuperation began. He was asked by the Angel Gibrael to strike the earth with his foot which he did and two fountains started flowing, one of tepid water to have a bath and wash his sores with, and the other of cool water with which to quench his thirst.

The bath and the drink had a miraculous effect on him. He immediately regained his health. Meanwhile Rahima returned from her work in the town and was surprised beyond measure to see Job fully cured and in excellent health. Lady Rahima too took a bath and drank from the fountain. She regained her health and beauty immediately.

In course of time Job was restored to prosperity, twice as much, as he had before his misfortune. His friends came back to him; he had a new family of seven handsome sons and three fair daughters. He lived to a good old age of 140 years and saw four generations of descendants.

Job's life was an example before mankind. He showed how a patient, faithful and righteous servant of Allah was rewarded by His grace. Equally exemplary was the love, devotion and trust of lady Rahima towards her husband. "Those who, when misfortune befalls them, say surely we are Allah's and to Him shall we surely return. These are those on whom blessings and mercy from their Lord descend and those are the followers of the right course."

SHUAIB THE APOSTLE TO THE MADYAN PEOPLE

The Madyan people were a wandering tribe. Their main settlement was in the North-East Sinai Peninsula. They were thus on the main commercial highway of Asia, between Egypt and the Mesopotomian Empires of Assyria and Babylon. They were a commercial people and became quite prosperous.

Their main sin was selfishness in commercial transactions and cheating in weights and measures. They also caused mischief and committed highway robbery, thus disturbing the trade, peace and order in the region.

Allah chose Shuaib, a Midianite noble, as the prophet to guide his people to a righteous and good living. He pointed out their besetting sins of fraud in business and disorderly conduct. He appealed to them saying that they were a small tribe at the beginning and by Allah's favour they increased and multiplied in numbers and in wealth. The faith in Allah, the source of a virtuous life, was lost to them. He urged them to return to believing in Allah. To maintain the commercial prosperity, they should be just and honest in their dealings. He warned them that sins would surely bring destruction.

Madyan was torn by internal conflicts. A small band believed in Shuaib's mission followed his teachings.

Even if persecuted by the unbelievers, he preached patience with perseverance. For, Allah's power of justice would triumph in the end.

The gentle and polite arguments of Shuaib made the unbelievers more arrogant and they threatened to turn him and his followers out of the city unless they would return to the pagan religion and condone their evil practices. The Midianite chiefs said, "O Shuaib ! we shall certainly drive thee out of our city, thyself and those who believe with thee ; or else ye (thou and they) shall have to return to our ways and religion." Shuaib replied, "We should indeed impute a lie to Allah, if we returned to your ways after Allah hath rescued us therefrom ; nor could we by any manner or means return to it unless it be as in the will and plan of Allah, our Lord. In Allah is our trust." Then he prayed, "Our Lord ! Decide thou between us and our people in truth ; for Thou art the best to decide." At this they threatened that there would be nothing but ruin for Shuaib and his followers.

The Angel Gibrael informed Shuaib that the destruction of the Madyan people was imminent. So the Apostle Shuaib accompanied by about one thousand and seven hundred of his followers left the city. As the Caravan was leaving the city, the Midianites taunted Shuaib. But the shadow of the end of the incorrigible and unrepentant sinners was already spreading. A dark cloud overcast the sky,

a heat-wave withered everything, a thundering sound and an earthquake seized the city of Madyan by night. By the next morning the evil people were buried in their own houses, no longer to threaten His Apostle.

Allah's mercy saved Shuaib and his followers from the destruction. The exiled prophet and his companions returned to the city and established the rule of righteous laws. Shuaib lived another twenty-four years in the peaceful and prosperous land of the Madyan. Thus Allah rewards good people, as He punishes the evil.

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THE PROPHET MOSES (MUSA)

When Joseph was the Minister of Pharaoh, the family of Israel (Jacob) migrated to, and settled in Egypt. They were a clever people and prospered in material and other respects more than the average Egyptians. This must have made them conspicuous and an object of hatred by the Egyptians. Many years after Joseph, there came to the throne of Egypt a Pharaoh who hated the Israelites and wanted them to be eliminated completely. He ordered Israeli male children to be killed at birth while female children to be kept for the pleasure of the Egyptians. Thus there would have been no Israelite as a race in a few years !

Moses brought up in the palace of the Pharaoh

Moses was born of Israeli parents when, under Pharaoh's orders, all Israeli male children were to be killed at birth. But his mother hid him a few months inside their house. As he grew up, further concealment became difficult. At this time she was inspired by Allah to put little Moses into a chest and send the chest floating down the Nile. She was also assured that she had no cause of fear nor harm afterwards, as the child would grow up under her tender care and would become an Apostle of Allah.

The chest, with little Moses in it, flowed on into a stream that passed through Pharaoh's garden. It

was picked up by Pharaoh's servants. The baby Moses was a beautiful child and he attracted the affection of the Pharaoh's wife, the queen Asiya. She wanted to adopt him as she did not have a son. She said to the Pharaoh, "(Here is) a joy of the eye for me and for thee. Slay him not; it may be that he will be of use to us or we may adopt him as a son." At this request the Pharaoh readily agreed. The child was crying, and refused all sustenance and suckling. Pharaoh's wife became worried. She did not know what to do.

A sister of Moses at her mother's bidding followed the chest from the bank to see where and by whom it would be picked up. When it was picked up by Pharaoh's own family and they seemed to love the child, she appeared like a stranger before them and said, "Shall I show you one who will nurse and rear the child?" That was exactly what they wanted. She ran home and told her mother. The mother was delighted to come and hold the infant in her arms again and feed it at her breast, all that openly and without any concealment.

Years passed. The child grew up to maturity. In outward learning he was of the house of Pharaoh. It was in Allah's plan to bring up Moses in all the learning of the Egyptians, in order that he could expose what was wrong among the Egyptians and to advance the glory of Allah. Through his contact with his mother, he had developed in his inner growth feelings

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and sentiments of his own people of Israel. Moses was good at heart, true and loyal to his own people obedient and just to those among whom he lived, Allah granted him knowledge and wisdom. His reputation as a learned man spread all over Egypt.

Exile to the Land of Midianites

When his knowledge and wisdom had sufficiently developed, and he got deeply engrossed with the problems of the Israelites and the affairs of man and matters, Allah gave him Divine commission as an apostle.

Moses used to visit the city privately by eluding the palace guards. His object might have been to see for himself how things were going on with the Israelites. He knew that they were hated and oppressed by the Egyptians. One day when he was visiting the Israelite colony, he saw an Egyptian hitting an Israeli carpenter apparently with impunity. Moses felt brotherly sympathy for the Israelite and struck the Egyptian. He did not intend to kill him, but in fact the Egyptian died of the blow. He was, however, full of regrets and repentance. He prayed to Allah for forgiveness, and Allah most Merciful forgave him. At that time he took a solemn vow to dedicate himself to the service of Allah, and to do nothing that might help those who were doing wrong.

Next morning Moses saw the same Israelite quarrelling with an Egyptian. At first he thought

that the Israelite must be a quarrelsome person. As he was scolding him, he realized that the Egyptian was unjust and Moses was about to intervene. But he was warned by the Egyptian and a friend that the previous day's murder incident had attracted the notice of the Pharaoh and it was dangerous for him to be seen in the city. Moses realized that he was secure neither in the palace, nor in the city, nor anywhere in Pharaoh's territory. He, therefore, chose to flee the country and exile himself voluntarily to another land. He did not know exactly where to go. But as he dedicated himself to the service of Allah he turned to Him for guidance. With His merciful guidance Moses finally reached the land of the Midianites in the Sinai peninsula.

At the end of a day's journey Moses arrived at an oasis in the desert, tired and anxious about his uncertain future. He rested under a tree near a well which was covered with a huge stone. He watched a group of shepherds remove the stone and pull up buckets of water for watering their flocks. He noticed nearby two damsels, also waiting aside with their flocks which they had brought to water. He was a kind man, ready to help others. He enquired why they were waiting aside and the maidens told him that their father was an old man, there was no other male in the house to water their flocks and they would not jostle with the shepherds in order to water their flocks. This was why they waited aside until the shepherds took back their

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flocks. Moses offered to help them. Meanwhile the shepherds replaced the stone over the well and left the place with their sleep. Moses all by himself immediately removed the stone-cover which took about a dozen shepherds to move. As he was watering the flocks the damsels were admiring his strength and manliness. Then he returned to his resting place in the shade.

The maidens were gone with smiles on their faces and gratitude in their hearts. Moses was a homeless wanderer, in desperate need of food and shelter. He had rested for a while, when one of the damsels came back walking with a blashful grace! Modestly with a sweet smile she gave her message, "My father invites thee that he may reward thee for having watered our flocks for us." Nothing could be more welcome than such a message through such a pretty messenger, so thought Moses.

Moses went of course, and saw that the old man was a Midianite chief. Moses told him his story - who he was, how he was brought up by the Pharaoh and what misfortune made him quit Egypt. They all showed him sympathy and assured him that he had escaped to safety from an unjust people. The old man offered him hospitably and shelter under his roof. Moses accepted the offers with polite thanks.

One of the damsels suggested, "O my father! engage him on wages. Truly the best of men for

thee to employ is the one who is strong and trusty." The old man was impressed by Moses and wanted to have some intimate and permanent relationship with him. The father asked if he would marry one of the daughters and stay with them for at least eight years, or if he liked ten years; but the longer term was at his option. Moses was glad at the proposal and accepted it. They ratified it in the most solemn manner, by appealing to Allah to be the surity of their pledged words. The old man, knowing the worth of his son-in-law, assured him that in any event he would not take advantage of his position to be a hard task-master or to insist on anything inconsistent with Moses' interest, should a new future open out to him.

The intimate relations in love, marriage and mutual assistance may have been a preparation for the highest spiritual destiny that was awaiting a messenger of Allah, Moses was destined to a new and glorious future.

Called to the Divine Ministry.

The spiritual history of Moses began in the sacred valley of Tuwa just below Mount Sinai. After living about ten years in the house of his father-in-law, he was travelling with his family and flocks towards Egypt to see his parents and friends. It was during this journey on a cold and windy night that Moses was called to his mission.

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This happened in a dramatic way. His wife had a birthpang and saw a fire at a distance and went there to bring a burning stick to light a fire for her comfort and hopefully to meet someone to guide him. It was not an ordinary fire, it was a Burning Bush, a flow of the presence of angels reflecting the glory of Glorious Allah. He heard a voice from the direction of the fire, "Verily I am thy Lord! I have chosen thee; listen then to the inspiration:

Verily I am Allah, There is no Allah but I.
So serve thou Me (only) and establish
regular prayer for celebrating my praise.
Verily the hour (of judgement) is coming—
My design is to keep it hidden—for every
soul to receive its rewards by the means of
its endeavour.

Therefore let not such as believe not
therein, but follow their own lusts,
divert thee therefrom lest thou perish.

Then, as signs of authority for an Apostle, he was given the power to perform the miracle of the rod, turning it into a living snake and of making his right hand shine brightly white. Moses was asked to throw his shepherd's rod on the ground and immediately it became a huge moving snake. He was frightened and began to run away from it. But Moses was ordered to turn back and touch the snake. As soon as he touched it, the snake reverted to Moses' old shepherd stick. Then he was asked to

put his right hand inside his left armpit. As he drew it out, his hand became snow-white emitting a bright light.

Moses, having been spiritually prepared, was asked to go to Pharaoh to try to turn him to Allah and also to have Israelites freed from the bondage in Egypt. Moses prayed for Allah's help in his tasks. He wanted his knowledge and wisdom to be increased, his speech to be more free eloquent, and to have his brother Aaron (Harun) with him as an adviser and a minister. Allah granted his prayer and assured him of Divine protection from any harm. He was, however, advised, "But speak to him (Pharaoh) mildly, perchance he may heed the warning or fear (Allah)."

This Divine mission upset the earlier programme of visiting Egypt with Moses' family. He decided to forsake the comforts of his family and leave them in Madyan in his father-in-law's house. Moses' wife readily agreed and returned to her father, while Moses left for Egypt.

Preaching to Pharaoh

Moses and Aaron returned to Egypt and preached the true religion of one Allah to the Pharaoh and his people, who used to worship animal-gods; for example: Anubis, dog emblem (god custodian of the dead); Apis, the sacred bull of Memphis (the god of renewal of life); Ibis, the stately mute mysterious bird of passage in the Nile valley (the

god of wisdom and magic). There were other gods to represent natural forces; the Nile, the sun (Ra the supreme god of Egypt), Orisis (the god of good) and Set (the power of all evil). "The Pharaoh declared himself "the supreme lord of you all." The priestly class and the ruling families used to live in luxury at the cost of virtual mass slavery of the people. The Israelites were in bondage. They were forced to do all sorts of menial work and many other hardships were imposed on them. As stated earlier, the Pharaoh planned to eliminate the Israeli race by killing all their male children at birth.

Moses' missions were, first, to spread the true religion of one Allah, and secondly, to free the Israelites from the bondage of the Egyptians. When the two apostle brothers declared themselves before the Pharaoh, he said, "Who then, O Moses, is the Lord of you two."

Moses said :

Our Lord is He Who gave to each (created) thing its form and nature, and further gave (it) guidances, He Who has made for you the earth like a carpet spread out, has enabled you to go about therein by roads, and has sent down water from the sky. With it Allah produced pairs of diverse plants, each separate from the others. Allah created man and everything will return to Him and be resurrected by Him.

Moses explained that these were some of the signs of Allah. As a proof of his apostleship he showed

miracles of his rod and his shining hand. But the Pharaoh was arrogant and a hardened sinner. He rejected the faith and accused Moses of a magical design to deprive them of their land. He told Moses that all these miracles that Moses showed were but magic and he said, there would be trial of strength between Moses and the Egyptian magicians on the day of the Festival.

The Pharaoh collected the best of the magicians in his kingdom. The art of magic was a strong point among the Egyptians. A great crowd assembled on the Festival day to witness the trial between the magicians and Moses in the presence of Pharaoh and his court officials.

Moses allowed the Egyptian tricksters to play their tricks first. Their display of tricks was so clever that it impressed everybody present. They threw on the ground their ropes and rods which seemed to move about like snakes. So realistic did the effect of their magic look that even Moses felt a throb of fear in his heart. He, of course, had no tricks and he relied entirely upon Allah. Moses was reassured by Allah not to be afraid; the trickery and magic must come to an evil end. Now Moses' turn came. His rod once thrown quickly swallowed up all the faked tricks. The bag of tricks came to nothing. The sorcerers came to realize the divine power of Moses. They fell down upon the ground in adoration of the Lord of the worlds, and confessed their faith to Allah's Apostle Moses.

The Pharaoh and his courtiers were every angry. First, they were humbled before the power of Allah, and secondly, the sorcerers themselves forsook the Egyptian gods and power of magic. Farash asccused the repentant sinners of high treason and threatened them with dire punishments such as cutting of hands and feet from opposite sides and death on the cross. But they remained firm in their newly acquired faith and prayed to Allah to give them courage and patience to abide by their faith. Pharaoh ordered their execution. They were patient martyrs of their faith. The Queen Asiya, the foster-mother of Moses, also defied Pharaoh and accepted the religion of Moses. Pharaoh showed his authority by executing her publicly. For her faith and self-sacrifice her position ranks as high as that of the other great women such as Mary, the mother of Jesus and Khadija, the wife of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him).

The Pharaoh was indeed extremely furious at the conversion of the queen, the star sorcerers and a few high officials including a minister of his court. But he was afraid of the powers of Moses and did not dare take any hasty action against him. For the Israelites he ordered increased harshness and a contiunation of the killing of Israeli male children.

Moses found a pervading sense of fear and despair among the Israelites. He addressed his people thus: "Pray for help from Allah and (await) in patience and constancy. For this earth is Allah's, and He grants its heritage to such of His servants as He

pleaseth. The end is the best for the righteous." He also assured them that Allah would destroy their enemy and make them the inheritors of the earth. Allah gives His gifts to those who are righteous and obey His laws.

The arrogant and unbelieving Eayptians were then subjected to various punishments, famines, plagues, etc. Whenever the chastisement had come and they suffered, they promised to mend their ways and begged Moses to intercede with Allah to relent and lift the scourge. But every time it was so lifted they broke their promise and went back to their evil attitude and bad deeds.

Exodus of the Israelities

Long years of preaching could not induce Pharaoh to turn to Allah, Moses then prayed, "Our Lord ! Thou hast indeed bestowed on Pharaoh and his chiefs splendour and wealth in the life of this world, and so, our Lord, they mislead (men) from Thy path. Destroy, O Lord, their wealth, and harden their hearts, so that they believe not until they see the grievous penalty."

Allah accepted Moses' prayer and at last commanded Moses and Aaron to leave Egypt with their people on the night of Festival. They were to cross the Red Sea and enter into the Sinai Peninsula. They were told to have no fear of the Pharaoh. At sunrise

the Pharaoh with his forces followed the fleeing Israelites. When Moses reached the sea, he was inspired to strike the sea with his rod. A miracle happened and the sea stood divided and Moses with his followers waded safely through the sea. The Pharaoh with his forces followed them, but the sea closed up and drowned them all. Thus Allah punished the oppressors.

Commission on the Mount

Soon after their exodus from Egypt, Moses ordered the Israelites to fight the Philistines (the 'Amaliqa) who were occupying the land Palestine that Allah promised to restore the Israelites. But they were too afraid to fight them. For their cowardice they were condemned to the life of desert nomads for about forty years. They were wandering in the Sinai Peninsula like a nomadic tribe. They needed laws and regulations and social discipline.

Moses went to the mount for forty nights' communion seeking guidance from Allah. Moses talked to Allah before from behind the clouds, but did not see Him. He now wanted to see Allah. No man, not even if he is an apostle, could see Allah. Even the reflected glory of Allah is too great for a mountain to withstand. Allah manifested His glory on a mountain peak which was reduced immediately to powder. Moses could survive but lay senseless. When he recovered from his swoon,

he realized the power and splendour of Allah's glory. He at once turned to Allah in penitence and humble submission.

On the Mount Moses was given revelation in the form of laws inscribed on tablets (Ten commandments), their explanations and interpretations. It was now his prophetic duty to preach these to his people.

The Israelites Worship a Golden Calf

Before Moses left for the Mount he had appointed his brother Aaron, also a prophet, to act on his behalf as the leader of his people. Aaron was instructed to act rightly and not to follow the ways of those who do mischief.

During the absence of Moses, despite Aaron's protest, the Israelites melted all their golden ornaments and, on the suggestion of the wicked Samiri, the goldsmith, made the image of a calf similar to the Bull of Orisis, the Egyptian animal-god of Memphis which they had left behind.

When Moses returned from the Mount with laws and guidance from Allah and saw that his people were worshipping the golden calf, he grieved bitterly and became full of righteous indignation for their idolatry. He cast aside the Tablets in desperation. These wretched people, saved by Moses from the bondage of the Pharaoh, were tested during the short absence of Moses and they failed in the trial! Through

their leader Moses, they had entered into a covenant with Allah. Allah had promised to protect them and lead them to the Promised Land, and they had pledged their word to obey Allah's laws and His commandments. Under Allah's protection they came near the Land of Promise, but very foolishly they broke their agreement! They tried to put up excuses for their infidelity. They said that they were carrying golden ornaments and wanted to unburden themselves. Then on Samiri's suggestion they had melted the ornaments and made a golden calf out of it. The calf seemed to low which, to them, made it fit to be worshipped. Thus they tried to justify their wrong act of worshipping the calf. Moses in his anger destroyed the golden calf. Most of the people finally realized their fault and repented. Allah, oft-Forgiving and most Merciful, accepted their repentance and admitted them again into His favour.

When Moses' anger was appeased after the destruction of the golden calf, he picked up the Tablets of laws and, with some chosen elders, proceeded to the Mount. He left them behind at a little distance from the place where Allah spoke to Moses. They were to be the silent witnesses. But their faith was not yet complete and they dared to say to Moses that they would not believe unless they had a clear view of Allah. They were immediately struck with thunder and lightening. They were revived by Allah's mercy on the prayerful intercession of Moses. This experience had a sobering effect on the Israelites and they learnt

to obey Allah's laws out of fear of punishments. Allah's mercy is universal and all-pervading while His punishment grips those who do wrong and indulge in injustice.

After many years of wandering, the Israelites reached a valley on the frontier of the Sinai. But no water was found there. They felt very thirsty. Moses prayed for water. He was asked to collect the chiefs of the twelve Israeli tribes and to strike the ground with his miracle rod. Twelve springs gushed forth from the earth, one for each of the tribes. Moses advised them to use the water carefully from their respective springs. He urged them to live in peace among themselves and express gratitude to Allah. He also appointed the family of Aaron as the inheritors of the apostle office the Israelites.

Moses and Khidhr

Moses spent forty years with the Israelites wandering in the Sinai Peninsula, which is enclosed by the two arms of the Red Sea—the Gulf of Acaba and the Gulf of Suez. Moses was to meet a wiseman at the meeting place of the two seas. The mysterious wiseman is traditionally called Khidhr, who received from Allah the knowledge of the secrets of the apparent paradoxes of this life and the knowledge of Allah's Universal Plan.

Moses undertook a long journey to the meeting place of the two seas to meet Khidhr. He took

their leader Moses, they had entered into a covenant with Allah. Allah had promised to protect them and lead them to the Promised Land, and they had pledged their word to obey Allah's laws and His commandments. Under Allah's protection they came near the Land of Promise, but very foolishly they broke their agreement! They tried to put up excuses for their infidelity. They said that they were carrying golden ornaments and wanted to unburden themselves. Then on Samiri's suggestion they had melted the ornaments and made a golden calf out of it. The calf seemed to low which, to them, made it fit to be worshipped. Thus they tried to justify their wrong act of worshipping the calf. Moses in his anger destroyed the golden calf. Most of the people finally realized their fault and repented. Allah, oft-Forgiving and most Merciful, accepted their repentance and admitted them again into His favour.

When Moses' anger was appeased after the destruction of the golden calf, he picked up the Tablets of laws and, with some chosen elders, proceeded to the Mount. He left them behind at a little distance from the place where Allah spoke to Moses. They were to be the silent witnesses. But their faith was not yet complete and they dared to say to Moses that they would not believe unless they had a clear view of Allah. They were immediately struck with thunder and lightening. They were revived by Allah's mercy on the prayerful intercession of Moses. This experience had a sobering effect on the Israelites and they learnt

to obey Allah's laws out of fear of punishments. Allah's mercy is universal and all-pervading while His punishment grips those who do wrong and indulge in injustice.

After many years of wandering, the Israelites reached a valley on the frontier of the Sinai. But no water was found there. They felt very thirsty. Moses prayed for water. He was asked to collect the chiefs of the twelve Israeli tribes and to strike the ground with his miracle rod. Twelve springs gushed forth from the earth, one for each of the tribes. Moses advised them to use the water carefully from their respective springs. He urged them to live in peace among themselves and express gratitude to Allah. He also appointed the family of Aaron as the inheritors of the apostle office the Israelites.

Moses and Khidhr

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a fried fish which was carried by his attendant. The place where he was to meet his mysterious teacher would be indicated by the fish returning to life and its plunge into water when Moses got to that place. When they had reached the junction of the two seas, they rested on a rock where the fish regained life and took to water. But his attendant forgot to tell him of the event that the fish had escaped into the sea in a miraculous way. They proceeded on their journey. Fatigued and hungry, Moses asked of his attendant something to eat. This reminded his attendant of the escape of the fish. Moses regretted this lapse and afraid if he has missed the chance of meeting Khidhr. They then journeyed back to the place where the fish had disappeared. There Moses met Khidhr, the white haired, white-robed wiseman.

Moses wanted to keep company of Khidhr in order to learn something of the special knowledge that Allah had favoured him with. Khidhr smiled and said, "You can't keep patience in my company. And how can you keep patience in things beyond the compass of your knowledge?" Moses had the spirit of a good disciple. He promised to hold his patience and obey his teacher Khidhr. The teacher allowed Moses to accompany him on condition that he would be patient and not ask any questions about anything until the teacher himself would initiate discussion.

So they set out on journey. One day they were crossing a river in a boat when Khidhr scuttled it.

Moses became annoyed and said, "Hast thou scuttled it in order to drown those in it? Truly a strange thing hast thou done!"

Khidhr said, "Did I not tell thee that thou canst have no patience with me?"

Moses was sorry for forgetting his promise not asking questions and apologised. So they continued their journey. They met on the way a young man and Khidhr killed him. Moses became angry at this apparent crime and said, "Hast thou slain an innocent person who had slain none? Truly a foul (unheard of) thing hast thou done!"

The teacher answered, "Did I not tell thee that thou canst have no patience with me?"

Moses was again sorry and said that if he asked any more questions Khidhr could freely dismiss him the company.

Then they continued their journey and reached a town. They were hungry and tired because of their long journey. They asked for food and drink. The people of the city were rude and denied them the customary hospitality to strangers. Instead of showing them any displeasure, Khidhr did a kind act. In co-operation with Moses, he worked hard for the repair; work was completed but Khidhr did not so much as ask for any remuneration. Moses naturally surprised and said, "If thou hadst wished, surely thou couldst have asked for wages for it."

Khidhr answered, "This is the parting between thee and me." But he was kind and told Moses the

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meaning of those events over which Moses was unable to hold patience. As for the boat, it belonged to a certain poor people who were plying it for hire. They did not know, but Khidhr did, that the boat had been marked down to be seized by force by an unjust king. If the boat had been taken away from the poor owners, they would have been reduced to beggary. By a simple act of making it unserviceable the boat was saved from seizure. The owners could repair it as soon as the danger had passed. Khidhr probably paid the boatman liberally in fare and some money for repairs. What seemed very cruel was indeed an act of kindness in the circumstances.

Secondly, the slaying of the youth seemed at first sight even a more cruel act than scuttling the boat. Khidhr knew that the youth was a potential patricide. His parents were good people. But the son was disobedient. He had gone wrong and become an outlaw. Khidhr removed him so that he could not be a public nuisance and a sorrow for his parents. His parents would get a good son who would love and honour them.

Thirdly, the wall belonged to two orphans. There was beneath the wall a buried treasure left for them by their father who was good man. It was intended that the orphans should grow up and take possession of their heritage intact. If the wall were not repaired the orphans might have been robbed of the treasure. This is how Allah rewards the righteous and good.

Encounter with Qarun.

Qarun was the richest man among the Israelites. Qarun's treasures were such that it took a body of strong men to carry only the keys of his treasure chests.

For his wealth and cleverness, Qarun was considered the leading man among the Israelites before the advent of Moses and Aaron. Since Moses was acclaimed as the undisputed leader of the Israelites, Qarun's influence in the community declined. Although he outwardly declared to follow Moses, he and his followers were harbouring resentment secretly against him.

Qarun and his followers rose in rebellion against Moses. First, they spread false rumours, which were proved wrong. Then Qarun claimed that because of his wealth, position and fame in the society, he should be treated as equal in status with the priests and allowed to burn incense at the sacred altar in the Synagogue. It was the duty and privilege of the priests only to burn incense at the sacred altar.

The priests explained to him that burning of incense was their duty; they could not allow Qarun to do that. He was further told that his wealth was Allah's gift to him. Allah grants wealth and power to whomever He likes. So he should not be proud of his wealth. Allah does not love those who boast of their riches. He was advised to do good

to his people with his wealth, to use it for production trade and for charity among the needy. He should not be a miser, nor should he do mischief with wealth; for Allah did not love those who did mischief in the land.

Qarun was so arrogant and proud of his wealth that he thought that his own merit, knowledge and cleverness alone had earned him his wealth. But he forgot that his birth, wealth and intelligence were primarily gifts of Allah. He was fond of showing off his wealth in luxurious ostentations. He used to wear the finest clothes adorned with precious jewels. Once he staged a grand and showy procession. These ostentations showings had some influence on people who were fond of wealth and its glitter. Some of them envied him and wished that they too had the good fortune to have wealth like that of Qarun. But not so the people with wisdom. They knew that happiness in this earth and hereafter came from faith in Allah and righteous work, and not necessarily from wealth.

For their pride and for slandering the prophet, Qarun and his followers earned Allah's wrath and they had an exemplary punishment. The earth opened up a fissure and swallowed them up with all their houses and wealth. The earth closed upon them and they perished.

Those who admired Qarun now realized that his wealth did not help him as he was a proud mischief

maker. All wealth and power come from Allah and these should be used for just and good causes. Pride and mischief can only bring misery and destruction.

Death of Moses

Through trials and hardships Moses organized the Israelites into a disciplined and strong community. Moses unfortunately died at the age of 120, before he could lead the Israelites triumphantly into the promised land. It was for his successors to organize as an efficient fighting force. At the time of the prophet Samuel, King Saul fought the Philistines victoriously. Later on, David finally defeated the Philistines and established firmly the Israelites in Palestine.

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THE PROPHET DAVID (DAUD)

After the exodus from Egypt, Moses with his people wandered in the Sinai Peninsula. Through great trials and sufferings and under the guidance of the Mosaic laws, the community of the Israelites was eventually disciplined and strengthened. During the time of the Prophet Samuel they were organized under their King Saul (Talut). Before Saul the Israelites were in a continuous state of war with the Philistines. The Philistines defeated the Israelites and carried away the sacred relics, the symbol of Israeli unity and authority, the Ten Commandments engraved on stone with relics of Moses and Aaron. The Israelites were expelled from their dwellings and many were taken captives. With the loss of the relics to the Philistines and a series of reverses in battle, the Israelites became demoralized. They requested their prophet to pray to Allah for the favour of a good and strong leader under whom they could fight the Philistines. The prophet announced Saul as their King chosen by Allah. The wealthy and wicked among them disputed the choice of Saul being a poor man. The prophet said, "Allah has chosen him to be your King and has given him ample knowledge and physical prowess. Allah confers authority on whomever He wishes." Saul was a great leader and a strict disciplinarian. He eliminated from his troops all half-hearted cowards and led a small

The Prophet David (Daud)

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group of faithful followers to fight the Philistine hordes a group inspired in the belief that "many a small hand vanquished large armies with the help of Allah Who always aids the patient people strong in faith."

David was one of Saul's followers. He was only a shepherd boy. He was not even known to all in the Israelite camp. He had no arms and armour. But David had a strong faith in the cause of the Israelites that made him more than a match for the Philistine army.

At daybreak, when the Israelites and the Philistines were battle ready, David wanted to face Goliath (Jalut) the giant Commander of the Philistine forces. Saul offered his own armour and arms to David. The young shepherd declined the offer as he had not tried them before, whereas his shepherd's sling and staff were his well-tried weapons.

Both sides were in battle formation facing each other from a distance of only a few hundred feet. Goliath stood like a rock in front of his army. David proceeded ahead of the Israelite army. Seeing a lad coming forward, Goliath mocked at David, but David paid no attention. He was concentrating on his tactics. He had picked up five smooth pebbles from a stream-bed. He aimed his sling from a safe distance and used it to such an effect that a pebble struck Goliath on his temple knocking him down.

David then dashed forward and seized Goliath's own sword to slay him. This sudden and unthought of event sent a consternation in the Philistine army which broke battle formation and started to flee in disarray. They were pursued and destroyed by Saul's army. King Saul was very pleased with David and gave him his daughter in marriage.

David had many adventures after his victory over Goliath and eventually became the king of the Israelites. He was a great king, a superb orator, an upright judge, a prophet with the book, Zabur (or the Book of Psalms), and was endowed with many other gifts. He had the gift of music and sang in his Psalms the praise of the Lord of the earth and the heavens. And with him all nature,—hills, mountains and birds, sang and echoed back the praises of Allah in the morning and at sundown. He was a great warrior himself. He was also a great general and organizer. He invented the coats of mail and other defensive armour. He used his wealth, power and military skills for the good of his people and not for oppression, nor for aggression against other people.

David was a great self-disciplined man. He divided his time into three parts. First, as a pious man he spent some time in prayer and meditation in his private chamber. Secondly, the major part of the day he used to devote to the affairs of state; he would listen to complaints, settle disputes, administer

law and order, and attend to military affairs and explain and enforce the Mosaic Laws. Thirdly, David used to spend some time with his family. He also earned his own living and that of his family by making coats of arms and various weapons made of iron. David, great and good though he was, had a little self-pride. Allah in His mercy wanted to try him and purify his soul.

One day suddenly his privacy in the prayer chamber was invaded by two men who eluded the palace guards by climbing over a palace wall. David was frightened at the appearance of the strangers. But they said, "We have come to seek thy justice as king. We are brothers and we have a quarrel, we wish thee to decide." The brother who was aggrieved said, "My brother has nine and ninety ewes, and I have but one. Yet he says, 'Commit her to my care and he is (moreover) harsh to me in speech.'"

David said, "He has undoubtedly wronged thee in demanding thy (one ewe) to be added to his (flock of) ewes. Truly many partners (in business) wrong each other. Not so do those who believe and act righteously; and how few are they."

David would have gone on preaching in his self-complacency and kingly pride, but suddenly the two contending brothers disappeared mysteriously. David realized his mistake. He should have listened to both sides, ascertained facts and then decided the

case on merit; instead he had shown his self-righteousness.

As a believer in Allah and good man he immediately repented and asked for Allah's forgiveness. This was freely accepted. Allah inspired the following message to him, "O David! We did indeed make thee a viceregent on earth. So judge thou between men in truth (and justice) but not follow thou the desires (of thy heart), for they will mislead thee from the path of Allah. For those who wander astray from the path of Allah is a grievous penalty that they forget the Day of Account."

THE PROPHET SOLOMON (SULAIMAN)

Solomon, son of David, inherited not only his father's kingdom but also the prophethood and many other virtues. Like his father, he was a great king, an upright judge and a righteous servant of Allah. His wisdom was evident even when he was only a child.

Helps David in Judgments

David sat in judgment and a dispute was brought before him. The case was that a flock of sheep, on account of the negligence of the shepherd, got into a cultivated field by night and ate up the young plants, causing damage to the extent perhaps of the whole year's crop. David considered the matter so serious that he awarded the farmer the sheep themselves in compensation for the damage to his crop.

Solomon was standing beside his father and watching the proceedings of the case. He thought of a better decision where the penalty would fit the offence. The loss was no more than the crop of one year nor irreparable. He, therefore, suggested that the farmer should not have the sheep as his permanent possession. Instead he should be awarded the sheep for as long as he may take to recoup his loss from the milk, wool, and also possibly the young ones of the sheep and then return the sheep to the shepherd. Solomon, although a mere boy, was given wisdom by

Allah and he was able to recognise Land and Lambs as capital so that damage to crop should be compensated not by the lambs but by their yield. Moreover, he was not afraid to put up his suggestion before his father, the king. David too was a good father and a noble king; he listened to his young son's suggestion and accepted it as he considered that it meets the ends of justice better. One must try to respect sound judgment irrespective of the age of the judge.

Two Mothers with a boy

Tradition gives another illustration of young Solomon's wonderful sense of justice. Once it so happened that two mothers in a village had two almost similar looking sons born to them. One day the two mothers left their sons in a hut and went out. Meanwhile a tiger entered and carried away one of the babies. The woman whose son was taken away by the tiger returned first to the hut. She immediately transferred the other boy into her own lost son's cot. When the real mother arrived, she recognized her own son and claimed it. Thus ensued a terrible quarrel over the boy. The elders could not settle the case. So they took the women and the baby to the court of king David for deciding the case. David listened to both sides and decided that the boy belonged to the first woman.

Solomon was watching the proceeding. He felt that justice was not done. With his father David's

permission, he recalled both the women to the court. Many people had gathered to watch the judgment of the two women claiming the same boy. Solomon summoned the court executioner who arrived in the to court with a drawn shining sword in his hand ready to strike down anyone on orders from the court. Solomon ordered the executioner to cut the beautiful little baby into two pieces and give one piece to each of the two contesting women. The executioner jumped forward, picked up the boy from the arms of the first woman, and was about to kill the boy. The first woman kept quiet. But the real mother felt very much grieved. She knelt down before the king and prayed not to kill, but rather to give the boy away to the first woman. The king and the entire court realized who the real mother was. So the baby boy was returned to the real mother.

Solomon was a great king with immense power and authority. He had influence even beyond his own kingdom, over many neighbouring peoples. He developed sea power with sailing ships. He had knowledge of the language of the birds and animals. He was just and wise, and understood men and knew how to command them well. Above all he had spiritual insight, which brought him nearer to Allah. In true humility and gratitude he referred all gifts or qualities to Allah, the Giver of all gifts. He was fully alive to his responsibility as the king to see that justice was done to all his subjects.

Solomon and the Ants

An example of his concern for all his subjects was shown in the incident of ants.

One day Solomon was marching with his forces. When they came to the valley of ant, one of the ants said, "O ye ants! get into your habitations lest Solomon and his hosts crush you (under foot) without knowing it."

Solomon understood the ant's warning. He was amused at her speech. Ants are useful insects and there should be room for them in Solomon's Kingdom and they should not be destroyed unnecessarily. He prayed to Allah that his power and wisdom, and all gifts be used for righteous causes to the benefit of all his subjects. He would not, in his preoccupation with great affairs of the state, tread unwittingly even on humble beings like ants. Both the rich and the poor, the strong and the weak were safe in his kingdom and received just treatment.

Visit of the Queen of Saba

Solomon was no easy going king. He kept his army and state organizations in strict discipline. The most mobile arm of his administrative organization was the birds who were light on their wings and watched far and wide like efficient scouts. One day he missed the hoopoe (hud-hud) in his muster. The hoopoe is a light graceful bird with elegant plumage of many colours and a beautiful yellow crest on its head which entitles it to be regarded as a royal bird. Solomon

declared that a severe punishment awaited hoopoe unless it could explain reasonably its absence from the muster call.

Hoopoe was not too far away. It came up and reported that it had returned from the land of Saba where Queen Bilquis was ruled seated on a magnificent throne. The land was rich and the people were prosperous. But they worshipped the sun. Solomon wanted to check Hoopoe's report by sending a message to the Queen of Saba inviting her to accept the true religion.

Queen Bilquis ruled over her people with great dignity and enjoyed their full confidence and support. She used to decide all affairs of the state in consultation with her Council and the Council would carry out her decision faithfully. Solomon's letter was referred to the Council. It contained a threat. They were ready to fight for their country and their queen. The chiefs of the court announced their determination to wage a war against Solomon. But Bilquis was wise and prudent; she knew that war would bring destruction to the country and humble its people. Therefore, she must if possible avoid war with the Israeli king Solomon. She thought that an exchange of presents would probably establish better relations between the two kingdoms and she also anticipated some spiritual enlightenment through this friendly association.

Poor Bilquis ! She thought she had arranged with sober tact to conciliate Solomon and at the same time pacify her war-like subjects. Solomon took it as an insult that she should send presents instead of her acceptance of the true faith. He threatened to wage a war against Saba and bring the queen and her people into submission. He said, "Ye chiefs, which of you can bring me her throne before they come to me in submission."

Ifrit, a large powerful fellow, reported to be wicked and crafty, said that he would bring the throne before Solomon rose from his Council. But there was one among the chiefs who had derived power from Allah. He had the throne of Bilquis transported immediately to Solomon's court without Bilquis ever knowing about it. Solomon immediately acknowledged his gratitude to Allah for endowing him with such power and authority. Man's gratitude to Allah is not a thing that benefits Him, for He is high above all needs ; humility benefits man's own soul.

Solomon wanted to test Bilquis if she would accept the true faith of her own will. If she did she would recognize her throne whatever its shape was. It was a symbolic test. So he transformed her throne beyond recognition but into a better shape.

When Bilquis, the Queen of Sabn, arrived in Solomon's court, she was received with honour and

dignity. Bilquis also stood the test of the throne. She recognised her throne, although it was not exactly the same ; for it was much improved. She acknowledged Solomon as Allah's apostle and accepted the true faith.

Bilquis was invited to enter a great palace to attend a royal banquet given in her honour. Its floor was made of slabs of polished glass that glistened like water. She thought it was really water, and in order to wade through it, she tucked up her clothes thus uncovering her feet and ankle. This was undignified for a queen. Solomon immediately told her what the floor was made of. She felt amazed and grateful for the information. She also perceived that she was entering the palace of truth which was to make clear to her many mysteries of spiritual life.

Temple in Jerusalem

Solomon built a great mosque in Jerusalem, his capital, for the worship of Allah. It was a great event in Israelite history. The ordinary workers, probably some unruly captives, were working under his supervision. The skilled workers called 'Sons of David' worked heart and soul as they knew they were building the house of Allah. It was adorned with arches, a large font and many other costly articles of grace and beauty. The motto was "work with thanks," for only that would justify the kingdom of David, which reached its zenith under Solomon. Without hard work for righteous ends, all that glory

and power would be out of place and be taken away from the hands of the Israelites.

As the masque was being built, Solomon was supervising the work leaning on his staff. He died in that position. No one, not even the labourers working directly under his supervision, knew about his death, except a little worm of the earth, which kept gnawing away at his staff. When the staff broke down and he fell on earth, the indifferent labourers realized that Solomon was no longer alive. They stopped work; for they thought that the building of the mosque was an imposition of hard labour on them rather than an act of sincere thanks to Allah for all His bounties and mercy on man.

Solomon's successors did not keep up his motto of 'work with thanks'. They degenerated in moral spirits and declined in good work. Thus the kingdom of David and Solomon fell away in a few generations.

JONAH (YOUNUS) THE MAN OF THE FISH

The prophet Jonah was born of an Israelite family in a Syrian city. As a young man he was well-known for his wisdom and virtue. He married a pretty woman of his tribe. They were blessed with two sons. At this time he received the Divine call to go to Nineveh and preach there the religion of Allah.

Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire, was a great city of over a hundred thousand people. The Assyrian Empire was prosperous and the great emperors adorned the capital city with beautiful buildings and palaces. Arts and crafts, trade and commerce added to the great wealth of the empire and made the city rich and the people lived in luxury. But they were idolaters and wicked and turned it into a city of sins. It was now Jonah's duty to guide the people of Nineveh to Allah.

Jonah was said to leave his native city in Syria. But he put his duty as a prophet much higher than his love for, and security in his native city. So Jonah with his family set out for Nineveh. After a long and difficult journey they reached Nineveh.

Jonah's preachings and warnings were unheeded by the people of Nineveh except a few just and courageous persons. They could see Jonah's strong

arguments about giving up idolatry, but were not ready emotionally to give up their forefathers' religion so quickly. Jonah tried for forty years to convert the people of Nineveh to the religion of Allah. As he was rejected by the vast multitude of people, Jonah denounced them and called for Allah's wrath on them. He declared that if they did not reform themselves a terrible heat-wave would, after thirty-five days, start blowing, followed in succession by fire, rain and other calamities destroying their city on the fortieth day. Allah accepted his invocation, The Ninevans, however, did not take the denouncement nor the warning seriously.

On the thirty-fifth day Jonah accompanied by his family left the city and absorbed himself in prayer and meditation in a lonely place at a little distance from the city. He wanted to watch from a distance how the city was destroyed.

And it so happened as the prophet announced, that on the appointed day, the sky was overcast and a heat-wave started blowing furiously. At this the people of the city became very frightened. They tried to find out Jonah in order to declare their acceptance of his religion. But he was not to be found anywhere. In desperation, they destroyed all their idols, acknowledged their faith in Allah, and asked for His forgiveness. The seeds of faith that were sown by Jonah seemed to have sprouted in their hearts, Allah, the Merciful, forgave them and saved them from the calamity.

Jonah could not understand anything from his hiding place. He did not know that had happened in the city in his absence. He wondered how the pronounced calamities stopped. He became rather frightened as the circumstances would prove him a liar and he knew that death was the punishment for a liar in Nineveh. Without inquiring why the punishment was withheld and without awaiting for further guidance from Allah, he decided to exile himself to a far away city. On his way, while crossing a fast-flowing river, his wife and the younger son were swept away by the current. His older son was carried away from the bank of the river by a tiger. Sad and forlorn he boarded a sea-going ship.

The ship was fully laden. It sailed for three days where it met with stormy weather. The sailors, according to their superstition, thought that there must have been a fugitive slave on the ship who was responsible for their ill-luck. Jonah in his escape from his duty as prophet felt that he was really a fugitive slave of Allah. So he declared that he was the fugitive. But the sailors did not think Jonah to be a slave. So they decided to cast lots and it fell on Jonah three times. He was thrown out into the stormy sea.

A big fish, probably a whale, swallowed Jonah. But in the depth of the darkness Jonah repented sincerely and cried out to Allah, "There is no god but Thou. Glory to Thee, I was indeed wrong." Thus Jonah prayed for Allah's forgiveness. Allah,

most Gracious, forgave him. After three days the fish threw him out and he was cast ashore on a lonely beach. He was quite ill and hungry. He wanted fresh air and solitude. A shady gourd plant gave him both shade and fruits to eat. Thus refreshed and strengthened he started for Nineveh.

On his way he met his wife and two sons who, he thought, had been dead. The village people had rescued the older son from the tiger and similarly his wife and the younger son had also been retrieved from the river. When finally they reached Nineveh, Jonah was received with great rejoicing. On hearing how the people had forsaken idolatry and how Allah had forgiven them, he realised his mistakes and further prayed for Allah's forgiveness. Under his guidance Nineveh was once again turned to a great city of virtuous people. After preaching for thirty years Jonah died there. An old mound, about 230 miles north-west of modern Baghdad on the bank of the Tigris, is called the 'Tomb of Nabi Yunus', where Jonah is supposed to have been buried.

ZUL-QARNAIN THE TWO-HORNED ONE

Popular opinion identified Zul-qarnain with Alexander the Great. He was, as the Quran says, the Lord of the West and the East—Lord of the Greek states unified for the first time, the Persian Empire including Western Asia, Egypt, Central Asia, Afghanistan and the Punjab. He is represented with two horns on his head, the sign of the Greek god Jupiter Ammon who had two horns, for Zul-qarnain thought that he had a divine mission. He was born as a prince of the Macedonian King Philip, 365 years before Christ, and died, on his way back from the Persian conquest, in the city of Babylon at the young age of 33.

Great though he was as a warrior and conqueror, it was not the pomp and glitter of military victories that are mentioned in the Quranic parable, but the spiritual motives of his great life are highlighted. Three of his expeditions, the first to the West, the second to the East and the third to the place of the iron gate, are noted to show the evolution of a noble soul which achieved so much in so short an earthly life.

The dreamy, fearless, boy-wonder Zul-qarnain, during the reign of his father Philip, led an expedition to the West of Macedonia to annex the town of Lychnis. He accomplished the task quite easily. To the west of this town is the lake of murky water where at the end of his victorious expedition he saw

the sunset in a glorious display of colours. The romantic poet in him was thrilled to see the beauty and glory of nature. But he did not have much time to enjoy it. He had to bring peace, prosperity and happiness to his newly conquered land. This victory was the beginning of his world conquest. His love for nature, the excitement of new conquests, the opportunity to see new lands and meet new people, and the pursuit of his divine mission to establish a new order of civilized life took him to the four corners of the known world.

He had great power to do whatever he wanted with the Illyricians. He had just conquered the unruly people who created lots of trouble for the Macedonians. It was a question before him whether he would, as a punishment, put the barbarous hordes to the sword or show them mercy. Zul-qarnain showed the quality of a great statesman. He punished the guilty, but showed kindness to the innocent. Moreover, he laid more stress on the good he could do and the help he could render to those who lived peaceful and righteous lives. Thus he won the confidence of the conquered people as a just ruler.

The second episode took place in his expedition to the East, in the Persian territory and up to the Punjab plain. Here Zul-qarnain found a primitive people who lived in the open of the semi-desert plain and wore little clothing. He left them alone with their own way of life. He was fighting against the proud but effete rulers, not against common

people. He was wise and his purpose was to bring about unity in his empire and he must avoid any unnecessary discord. He also recognized his own limitations. He was not arrogant of his power, rather he was tolerant of other peoples' ways of life.

In his third journey his mission was quite different. He had to protect a peaceful industrious people who were disturbed by invaders called Gog and Magog (Yajuj and Majuj) people. Who were these invaders? They were the Mongol tribes of Central Asia. Against these tribes they were willing to purchase immunity by paying the conqueror tribute in return for protection. The permanent protection they wanted was the closing of the mountain gap through which the invaders came.

Zul-qarnain realized the duties and responsibilities of the power and authority which Allah bestowed on him. It was his responsibility to protect his subjects without imposing undue taxation on them. He thought he could provide the inspiration and organising skill to help build a barrier in the gap. These people were good ironsmiths. He helped them to construct a strong wall of iron with iron gates. The iron wall, gates and towers were sufficiently high to prevent the Gog and Magog tribes from scaling them and sufficiently strong with welded metal to resist any attempt to dig through them.

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himself claimed no credit beyond that of discharging his duties as a ruler. He turned their attention to Allah Who had provided the ways and means by which they could be helped and protected. Man must take all possible precautions against evils. But no protection is complete unless man seeks the help and grace of Allah.

The iron gate mentioned in the Quran was probably the iron gate near the city of Derbend, about 150 miles south-east of Bukhara on the main route from Turkestan to Persia. There is no iron gate now, but it was still existing about 1,200 years ago when the Chinese traveller Hiouen Tsiang saw it on his journey to India.

THE PROPHET JESUS CHRIST (ISA)

The Prophet Jesus Christ, who received the Gospel (Injeel) and preached the true faith of Allah, had a mysterious life. His birth and infancy were of a divine plan not usually met with. As a prophet he showed many miracles and the end of his earthly life also followed a divine scheme.

The descendants of the Prophet Aaron, brother of Moses, were the upholder of divine dispensations and hence a highly respected class among the Israelites. During the time of the Prophet Zakaria there lived in Jerusalem a virtuous couple, 'Imran and his wife Hanna, who held the prophetic heritage. Hanna very much wished to have a son. So she prayed to Allah for a son promising that she would dedicate her son to the service of Allah in the sacred sanctuary of Jerusalem. Soon after her prayer she conceived and in course of time she gave birth to a beautiful daughter. This depressed Hanna but yet she prayed, "O my Lord! Behold! I am delivered of a female child! And nowise is the male like the female. I have named her Mary (Maryam) and I commend her and her offsprings to Thy protection from Satan, the rejected." Allah, in His infinite mercy, accepted her prayer and decreed for her a noble offspring.

When Mary reached the age of seven, according to her promise, Hanna took her to the sacred

precincts of Jerusalem. Under the Israeli custom, no woman was allowed to serve in sanctuary. But because of the earnest prayers of her mother and the divine look of the child she was allowed to live in a separate room (Mihrab) specially built for her within the precincts of the sanctuary. She was put under the care of her very old uncle the prophet Zakaria who used to teach her the scriptures. Mary grew up there as a beautiful and virtuous woman. She used to spend most of her time in prayers and service to the sacred precincts.

Whenever Zakaria would enter the Mihrab, he would find there some or other food for her sustenance. "Whence is this?" Zakaria asked. "This is from Allah," she replied, and added, "Verily Allah grants sustenance beyond measure to whomsoever He pleased." Zakaria and all the holy men of the sanctuary were much impressed by Mary's piety and the special favours shown to her by Allah. One day an angel appeared before Mary and gave her the good news of the gift to her of a holy son called al-Masih Isa son of Maryam (Messiah) who would be held in honour in this world and in the hereafter and would be an apostle of Allah.

Mary was indeed very pleased at the news, but she was also very surprised and wondered how she could have a child without any husband. She was assured by the angel that her son's birth would be by a command of Allah and he would be a sign for mankind and a Mercy from Allah.

After she had conceived Jesus by Allah's command she lived in the sanctuary for nine months. Then she repaired to a remote place named Baitlham where Jesus was born. When she returned with baby Jesus in her arms, her people were surprised to see the baby talking in his cradle. He could talk from his birth, for Allah aided him with the holy spirit. The Baby Christ said, "I am indeed a servant of Allah. He hath given me revelation and made me a prophet; and He hath made me blessed wheresoever I be, and hath enjoined on me prayer and charity as long as I live. He hath made me kind to my mother and not everbearing or miserable." On hearing such words from the baby Jesus, people who had questioned the innocence of Mary were fully satisfied about his miraculous birth. They left for their homes glorifying the power of Allah.

It is said that at the birth of Jesus the court astrologer had told the Roman king of Jerusalem that the king of the Israelites was born. Jesus was identified as the would-be king of the Israelites. The king thought in worldly terms that when Jesus would grow up he would take away the throne from Romans. So he plotted to kill him. Moreover, the Jews of Jerusalem were constantly slandering and insulting Mary. Her cousin the kind-hearted Joseph took Mary and Jesus to a town in Egypt where they were warmly welcomed by the local king. There Jesus grew up as a handsome, educated and wise young man. When the old king of Jerusalem died, Jesus accompanied

by his uncle and mother returned to his native city of Jerusalem.

Allah taught Jesus not only the worldly knowledge, but also the Mosaic laws and the Gospel. He was appointed an apostle to the children of Israel in particular with the messages of the unity of faith and universal love and forgiveness. As signs of his apostleship, Allah endowed him with a few miracles. By Allah's leave he could breathe life into a clay bird, he could heal lepers and those born blind, quicken or revive the dead, and declare what people ate and stored in their houses.

First, Jesus addressed his message to the lost children of Israel. But the Jews, under the influence of their priests started maligning Jesus. They said his miracles were black magic. Disregarded completely by the Jews he began to preach to all classes of people saying that he had come to confirm the religion of Abraham and Moses, and guide them to the religion of love and forgiveness. One of the first groups to listen to him was a community of fishermen. Some of them accepted firmly the new religion. The number of his disciples grew slowly. He used to recite the Gospel and his disciples committed the same to memory. Those disciples and their followers later on spread Christianity all over the world. Some of his teachings have come down to us through them in the New Testament of the Bible.

One day Jesus went to the fishermen's village. He and his disciples went to a remote place for meditation and religious discussion. Here twelve disciples pledged their faith to Allah and requested Jesus to bear witness to their vow. They, however, wanted to eat from a table set with viands from heaven as a miracle to satisfy their hearts and to know that he indeed told them the truth.

Jesus said, "O Allah, our Lord ! Send us from heaven a table set with viands that there may be for us—for the first and last of us—a solemn festival and sign from Thee ; and provided for our sustenance ; for thou art the best of sustainers." Allah accepted the prayer of Jesus, but warned that if any of them present resisted faith afterwards, his punishment would be most grievous and unprecedented.

When by the Divine grace, food of various types, fish, meat, bread, honey, vegetables and fruits, were sent down to them Jesus asked his disciples to eat at their heart's content and thank Allah for His favour. Some of his followers of doubtful loyalty and wavering nature wanted to see some more miracles before they would firmly believe in Jesus.

By the leave of Allah, Jesus turned the fried fish to living and flopping fish. At this the doubting followers became frightened and said that it was a black magic and they would never touch the food. Jesus then invited the poor and sick people to eat from the left over food. A large number of people ate, still the basket containing bread and other food

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containers remained as full as before. Those poor people who ate the food became wealthy and the sick among them became healthy. Whereas those mischievous unbelievers suffered from sudden onrush of painful diseases and died shortly afterwards.

As the number of Jesus' followers increased, the rich and privileged priestly Jews also increased their hate-campaign against Jesus; for they thought that his teachings would reveal their fraud and falsehood and that they would lose their privileged position in the society. They did not stop at maligning him with blasphemy and black magic; they started plotting to kill him.

The Jewish priests convinced the Roman king that the teachings of Jesus were against the Taurat, the Jewish Scripture, and as such he was a liar. They argued that if Jesus were allowed to preach, the Taurat would be corrupted, chaos and lawlessness would grip the land. They appealed to the king that as the custodian of faith, law and order, he must do justice by stopping Jesus from preaching. The king got Jesus arrested, and depending on the interpretation of the Jewish priests, he ordered his death by crucifixion at a public place.

Jesus was kept in a cell under the protection of Jewish guards. But in the morning of the day of crucifixion, Jesus was nowhere to be found. He escaped miraculously from the condemned cell. The king's soldiers and the Jewish priests became very

puzzled. They caught hold of someone who apparently had an outward similarity in looks with Jesus. In spite of his repeated prayer that he was not Jesus, nobody listened to him and he was crucified.

The mystery of Jesus' escape from the hands of the Jewish priests is not known and so also is the miracle of his ascendance to heaven. When the Jews were trying to kill him, Allah assured Jesus of his withdrawal in heaven to Allah Himself, and of clearing him of the charge of blasphemy that he had declared himself God or the Son of God. Allah also assured that the followers of the teachings of Jesus would rise superior in wealth, power to those Jews who had rejected him.

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THE COMPANIONS OF THE CAVE

The unbelieving Quraish of Mecca were in the habit of putting before the holy Prophet Muhammad questions on Christian and Jewish religious issues. They thought that the Prophet could not answer them and thus they could embarrass him. One of those questions was about the Christian legend of the seven sleepers of Ephesus. The Prophet told them the story in outlines pointing out its spiritual lessons.

Ephesus was the famous capital of Asia Minor (modern Turkey) under the Roman Emperors. Under the Pagan Romans, the Christians were persecuted for their belief in one Allah. There lived in the city a group of young, high-spirited Christians. These youths protested against paganism and declared publicly, "Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth. These our people have taken for worship gods other than Him. Who doth more wrong than such as invent a falsehood against Allah?" After such a public denouncement of the Pagan gods, it could not be safe for them to stay in the city. They decided to hide themselves in a cave in the nearby mountains.

They took along some food and their faithful dog called Qitmir. When they reached the cave they prayed, "Our Lord! bestow on us mercy from

Thyself and dispose of our affair for us in the right way." The young men had complete trust in Allah's mercy and knew that He would solve their problems and give them ease and comfort.

As they went inside the cave Qitmir sat at the entrance of the cave, stretching his forelegs, and kept guard. The sun set and night covered the mountain side. The faithful Qitmir was still keeping watch. They had a good dinner and lay down on their back. Soon they fell asleep. By Allah's leave they stayed in their long sleep for more than three hundred years.

When they were awakened from their long sleep the dog was still sitting there. They questioned each other about the duration of their sleep. Some of them thought that they had slept for a day, and some others, only part of a day. They might have argued long but for the hunger which assailed them all. So one of them was sent to the town with money to buy some good food. He was warned by his companions to be careful about selection of lawful food. They also cautioned him against giving away their secret hide-out lest they be again persecuted for their faith and forced to return to the pagan cult of many gods and goddesses.

When the man from the cave came to the town, he was looking very odd to the townspeople. His old fashioned dress and speech, and the age-old

money with him at once drew attention to himself. When he told the story, they were first surprised but realized slowly the power of Allah. Who else could protect His servants thus and raise them up from sleep after such a long time !

Allah's promise of mercy to those who serve Him is the surest. The companions of the cave little knew that Christianity had become the accepted religion in the city. It proved to them that their trust in Allah was the best trust they could have.

This was a parable for explaining spiritual lessons to man. The prophet, while relating the story, warned that details, such as the number of sleepers, five or seven, or how many days or years the sleepers were in the cave, would only lead to futile controversies of no avail. Speculations on such things were useless. The important point of the story was its spiritual content. However, scientific knowledge based on experiments and investigations must be discussed and explained for the benefit of mankind.
